

‘Quit talking while I’m interrupting’’: a comparison between positions of overlap onset in conversation

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Prologue

My title is slightly misleading, for reasons that will become apparent. In part it is designed to capture your attention. But it also has a history. Several years ago (actually over a quarter of a century ago) some conversation analytic research purported to show that men interrupted women more frequently than women interrupted men – and that this interactional asymmetry reflected some power relations between the sexes (e.g. Zimmerman and West 1975). This research, now largely discredited, offered the prospect of demonstrating the interactional production – the ‘talking into being’ – of inequalities and power relations. At any rate, this was a period when Gail Jefferson had an honorary visiting position at the University of York. She had researched overlap/’interruption’ quite extensively (indeed, as Lerner recounts, it was on the basis of that work that she had an input into the famous paper by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson on turn-taking; Lerner 2004, Introduction). Moreover, this was something in which she and I were interested, not so much professionally or analytically, but as something that was part of our social lives, which we joked about – for reasons that need not concern us here. With this in mind, she returned from one of her visits home to see her folks in Los Angeles with a sticker for me (the kind people stick in the rear windows or on the fenders of their cars). It read *Quit talking while I’m interrupting* – an injunction to which thereafter we frequently resorted.

This paper relies to a considerable extent on Jefferson’s work on overlap/simultaneous talk; indeed my objective in this paper is only to explicate her findings about the orderliness of overlap onset (especially Jefferson 1973, 1983, 1986 & 2004). She would not have approved of anyone writing in her honour; therefore I’ll say only that this paper is in her memory.

Introduction

It is very common, in the research literature, in papers submitted for publication to the journals, in students' work and elsewhere, that authors describe what happens when one speaker starts speaking, whilst another is (already/still) doing so, as an interruption. All it takes is for there to be some simultaneous talk, some occurrence of two or more participants in a conversation talking together, and analysts will observe that one speaker has 'interrupted' the other. Almost invariably, the one who starts to talk 'second' – whilst the one who was talking 'first' is still speaking – is regarded as having 'interrupted' the other ('first') speaker. Furthermore, the occurrence of such an 'interruption' is treated as being an interactional transgression of some kind, a failure to adhere to the rules of conversation.

This is no place to review the account that Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson gave of the organisation of turn-taking in conversation (Sacks et al. 1974; see also Sacks 2004). But the salient points for our purposes here are as follows. Among the readily apparent features of conversation that they noted in that programmatic account, are that one speaker speaks at a time; that periods during which both speakers are speaking are common but brief; that speakership changes; and that transitions from one speaker to a next are managed with no, or minimum, gap or overlap (see Sacks et al. 1974: especially 696–706). Out of these and other features, Sacks et al. proposed a rule that, put simply, one speaker should speak at a time. They were concerned in that paper largely with matters of how turns are allocated to a 'next' speaker, how transitions and orderly transfer from one speaker to a next are managed. I won't say more about turn allocation/transition here, except to note that Sacks et al. show that (next) turn allocation is managed on a local, turn-by-turn basis, providing a kind of motivation for listening to what is being said, for monitoring when it might be one's turn next, and what it might be relevant to do or say.

My focus here is the observation by Sacks et al. that transitions from one speaker to a next are 'fine tuned' (the 'minimum gap or overlap' feature) – and more particularly the objection that might be raised that speaker transitions are not fine tuned. When we listen to conversations and look at transcriptions of recorded interactions, we find that instead of one speaker only beginning to speak when, and immediately after, another speaker has finished – that is, without any overlap or much

gap – in fact overlapping talk occurs with very great frequency, all over the place. Moments when both participants are speaking together are, if generally brief, very common.

The evident frequency with which speakers speak at the same time might suggest either that there is no such ‘one at a time’ rule, as Sacks et al. proposed; or that participants flout the rule with such frequency that it might as well not exist. Whichever is the case, it might appear from the frequency of overlapping talk that participants’ conduct is not rule governed, that they do not orient to any such rule. It might seem that far from being fine tuned, systematic and orderly, transitions from one speaker to a next are disorganised. Indeed it might seem that moments when two or more speakers are talking together, overlapping with one another, are moments of chaos – breakdowns in the smooth operation of any turn-taking system, perhaps arising from incoming (‘next’) speakers breaking conversational rules.

These apparent moments of chaos, of breakdown in the orderliness of conversational turn-taking, are generally attributed to two kinds of failure on the part of the ‘incoming’ speaker. ‘Next’ speakers are behaving either ‘without due care and attention’ (the driving metaphor will be elaborated shortly), or in a fashion which is ill-mannered. The first (failure to listen/attend carefully) is a kind of technical dereliction, the second (failure to observe the rules of good behaviour) a kind of moral or normative dereliction. Accounting for such inadvertent or deliberate transgressions generally takes one of these forms:

- The incoming speaker is being clumsy – they are interactionally gauche, inept or incompetent.
- The incoming speaker is inattentive, not listening carefully to what the other was saying and hence not realising that the other had not finished speaking.
- The incoming speaker is attempting to cut the other speaker off; realising the other had not finished, the ‘next’ speaker is nevertheless trying to close the other down.
- The incoming speaker is being rude.

In any of these accounts, the incoming ‘next’ speaker is taken to have *interrupted* the ‘first’; because it might appear that the ‘first’ speaker had not finished, the ‘next’ speaker is taken to be the transgressor.

This way of accounting for overlapping talk as the result of a failure by ‘next’/‘second’ speakers, who thereby interrupt the other, amounts to a ‘shunt’ theory of conversational transgression. In British motoring law (and I think in the US, and probably elsewhere), if a motorist collides with the car in front, that is drives into the rear of the car in front, it is always the ‘second’ motorist, the one driving behind, who is legally at fault. Claims that the driver in front braked suddenly, for no apparent reason, that the road was icy, that one’s attention was diverted by wondering whether a pedestrian was going to step out into the road – none of these has the least chance of success as a defence in law. Always, you should leave sufficient distance between you and the car in front to be able to stop, if necessary. So if you shunt the car in front, you’re convicted!

The same is not the case, however, for conversation; the ‘shunt’ theory is not an adequate explanation for conversational collisions.

The readiness in the research literature to treat overlapping talk as interruption, and the inadequacy and inappropriateness of doing so, has already been extensively and cogently discussed (see especially Drummond 1989 and Schegloff 2000). My purpose here is twofold. First, to put another nail in the coffin of the term ‘interruption’ – to convince you that overlapping talk is not *per se* interruption. ‘Interruption’ is a moral category, connoting principally that an ‘interruption’ is someone’s (‘next’ or second speaker’s) fault; and that it is an aggressive or hostile act. (The many studies in which putative ‘interruptions’ are taken as indicators of power, or the means through which power is exercised, displayed or managed, whether in cross-gender interactions, medical interactions or other kinds of professional/client interactions, rely on just those connotations of ‘interruption’.) We shall see that overlapping talk is frequently (I might say overwhelmingly, but I haven’t done the statistics) co-operative, affiliative, supportive.

My other purpose – and this is my main aim here – is to pull together from previous research, notably by Jefferson, that overlapping talk is not evidence for any interactional breakdown, chaos or disorder – but rather is generated systematically by participants’ very close attention to what another is saying, and their attempts to fine tune transitions from one speaker to a next. When someone speaks and happens to overlap with another, that ‘next’ speaker is not being inattentive or sloppy. Rather, they are monitoring closely the progress and trajectory of a turn, and aiming for the smooth transfer (without gap or overlap) from one speaker to the next. So that

overlapping talk is generated systematically by the same systems and practices for orderly turn transfer as account for ‘one at a time’ (i.e. turn transfers which do not involve overlap). All of which requires us to look carefully at precisely where in a ‘current’ speaker’s talk a ‘next’ speaker begins to speak – that is, the precise point of overlap onset.

Before we move to consider, in close detail, precisely where in a ‘current’ speaker’s turn a ‘next’ speaker may begin speaking, a remark about comparative analysis is in order. There are, in CA as in most other perspectives, a variety of forms of, or approaches to, comparative analysis. One such approach, represented in a book edited by Sidnell (Sidnell 2009) is cross-linguistic comparisons of some particular phenomenon or interactional practice. Thus the contributors to Sidnell’s volume each focus on some conversational practice (e.g. repair, assessment, gaze as a means to display reciprocity, and many others), which are susceptible to cross-linguistic comparisons to show whether they are (likely to be) universal practices, or language- or culture-specific. Cross-national, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons are perhaps what we generally consider to be ‘comparative’ analysis.

In a quite profound way, however, all conversation analytic studies are comparative, insofar as one of our most general methodological approaches is to compare the different turn designs that might be used in implementing or ‘constructing’ some action. For this reason, self-repair in conversation provides a particular insight into what goes into constructing a turn at talk. In comparing the different lexico-syntactic forms in which offers may be done, for instance, and showing that speakers orient to which form is appropriate in given sequential environments, it is significant that a speaker may change from one form to another, as she does here:

We:ll do you wanna me tuh | be tih js pick you | Can u you | (.) get in duh Robins'n?
so you c'buy a li'l pair a'slippers?h(.) | I mean er: | can I getchu somethin:g? er:
sump'm:? er sum'm:?

The speaker begins with a *do you want..* form, and finally through a series of self-repairs (highlighted in the extract) arrives at *can I get you something*. Such a self-repair as this not only enables us to make a comparison between forms in which offers are done (Curl 2006), but demonstrates that such ‘comparisons’ are salient to

participants. So also we can compare the different forms in which requests are done, particularly modal forms like *Could I..* and more ‘conditional’ forms such as *I wonder if I could..*, and investigate the different interactional circumstances in which each of these forms is used (e.g. comparing informal social interactions with institutional interactions; see Drew & Curl 2008). In general, any investigation into turn design, and how a turn is designed to implement an action, is comparative.

So too is this study; not because it focuses on turn design, as such, but because it examines the different positions in a turn’s progression/construction in which a ‘next’ speaker may start speaking. These different positions are to be found through comparing instances of overlapping talk; from which we can show that there are different types of overlap – at least with respect to their placement in a current turn.

Again, this comparative enterprise requires us to look carefully at precisely where in a ‘current’ speaker’s talk a ‘next’ speaker begins to speak – that is, the precise point of overlap onset. But first, we need to be clear that when speakers find themselves speaking together, they frequently display that they are nevertheless orienting to the ‘one at a time’ rule.

Overlap resolution: participants’ orientation to the rule ‘one at a time’

It is well known, in sociology as well as jurisprudence, that following a rule may not result in conduct which conforms to the rule: rule-following, as Garfinkel, Hart, Goffman and others demonstrated, may be consistent with and found amidst conduct which seems to transgress the rule. So it is with the rule that speakers should speak – take turns – one at a time. Listening to two (or more) people talk, whether face-to-face or over the telephone, reveals very many instances where they are talking at the same time. If you have any experience of transcribing recorded naturally occurring talk, you’ll know that some of the trickiest moments to transcribe are those where two (or more) speakers are talking simultaneously. At such moments, participants might be considered to be ‘breaking the rule’, and even perhaps ‘ignoring’ the rule.

Whilst they may indeed find themselves for a moment, for an instant, to be behaving in a way that transgresses the ‘one at a time’ rule, participants nevertheless display through their conduct their orientation and their commitment to the rule – that their transgression was in some sense inadvertent. They do so particularly through one or other of them withdrawing from the collision of talking together. The following

example is a case in point (the relevant overlap is highlighted by the shading: the focal overlap, position of overlap onset or other phenomena will, wherever possible, be similarly highlighted in all subsequent examples).

(1) [NB:II:2:1]

- 1 Emm: Bud js left'tplay go:lf he's gotta go tuh Riverside=
 2 Nan: =[O h : . .]
 3 Emm: =[‘nna comp'n]y dea:l so, .t.h[hhhhh
 4 Nan: [Oh::?
 5 Emm: ↑GOD [it's **bih-**
 6 Nan: [Tuh Riverside tihda:y?
 7 Emm: .hhh Yeah they: theh gun'tee off et twelve it's a comp'ny

Finding herself talking in overlap with her friend Nancy (see lines 5 and 6; I'll say more about their overlapping talk in lines 2–3 later), Emma drops out, as is shown by her cutting off what was probably going to be *been* (as in *God it's been...*). She doesn't simply carry on talking, asserting (perhaps) some entitlement to do so because she started speaking first. Her withdrawal from this moment of overlapping talk is precisely an orientation to the one-at-a-time rule; she minimises the transgression, and the period of talking together, by dropping out in favour of the other – recalling SS&J's point that periods of speaking together are common but brief. Here we see how participants manage to keep overlaps brief: one drops out, the other continues.

Dropping out of the talk in the other's favour, thereby minimising overlapping talk, does not mean that that speaker (i.e. the one who dropped out) 'loses' what they were in the course of saying. Only a few seconds later Emma re-introduced what she abandoned in line 5 (*God it's been* was to have been a prefatory remark introducing the matter of Robert Kennedy's assassination, and from there to a story; see Heritage 1990). That excerpt is a little too long to be shown here; but other examples illustrate how, when a speaker abandons their turn when they found themselves speaking simultaneously with the other, he/she may drop out, temporarily abandon their turn, resuming it when they are in the clear – generally by repeating what might have been 'lost' in the overlap.

(2) [Frankel]

- 1 Rich: I think **if** **[you-**
 2 Car: [Am I right?
 3 (.)
 4 Rich: **If you** bring it intuh them.

(3) [NB:II:2:19]

- 1 Nan: En it wz inexcusable that he couldn'of made some (0.2)
2 kin' of cont*act yihkn*ow w*ith *iz f*am'ly *er me en
3 .hhhhh I guess she rilly js (.) told im o:[ff'n meh-]'n]
4 Emm: [W'l goo:]d]
5 (.)
6 Nan: **made** him angry en he: °hung up.°

(4) [Goldberg]

- 1 Fran: He's not gunnuh li:sten [tuh tha:t,
2 Jim: [I'm not say in- I'm not
3 saying that...

In each of these examples, finding him/herself speaking simultaneously with the other, the speaker stops what he/she is saying, cuts off and resumes when they are in the clear – by partially repeating their abandoned turn, and continuing.

Perhaps it will be sufficient to look at only one of these examples in detail.

Example (3) occurs a little later in the same conversation between Emma and Nancy from which the first example was taken. Nancy is describing how her ex-husband's mother told him off for not contacting either her, or Nancy, on Mother's Day. It is evident that Nancy was in the course of saying (line 3) that she *really just told him off and made him angry* ("meh-" being the beginning of *made*), abandons that when she finds herself in overlap with Emma's approving interjection in line 4, then resumes by partially repeating what was lost in overlap (the first sounds in *made*) and completes her turn (all in line 6).

It will be possible, given space restrictions, to show only a very few instances of each of the phenomena reviewed in this paper. So these four examples will have to suffice to illustrate that by not continuing to talk together in overlap, but instead one or other of the participants stopping, cutting off and temporarily abandoning their turn – and resuming when they are in the clear – participants in conversation *orient to* the one-at-a-time rule. Though finding themselves contravening the rule, they display that nevertheless they are adhering to it. So the frequency of overlapping talk is not evidence that no such rule exists; rather, participants' conduct in minimising the consequences of their talking together (a kind of 'damage limitation', if you like) is evidence that they are indeed 'following the rule' (Hart's 1960 discussion of rule

formalism and rule scepticism captures this precisely, in matters of legal rules – laws – not determining action).

Overlap onset: the three ‘positions’ at which overlapping talk begins

In the previous section we saw something of how overlapping talk may be resolved. That is, we saw that when two speakers find themselves talking together, simultaneously (these examples will have to stand proxy for more complex but nonetheless orderly instances where more than two speakers are talking simultaneously), the overlap is resolved by one or other (temporarily) dropping out. That’s all I’ll have to say about how the occurrence of overlapping talk – the collision involved when two or more speakers speak at the same time – is resolved. From here on, I’ll be considering only the points at which a speaker may begin speaking, only to find that the other is also speaking, so that they end up speaking together/simultaneously. That is, I am considering the points where overlaps begin – the moments of overlap onset. The purpose of examining (comparing) the points of overlap onset is to show how it is that speakers, whilst following the one-at-a-time rule, can come to find themselves talking together. How does that come to happen, that a participant can begin speaking, only to find him/herself speaking at the same time as the other?

Research into overlap (and particularly Jefferson’s research into overlap) shows that there are some fundamental and orderly positions of overlap onset – that is, places in the other’s talk, the ‘current’ speaker’s talk, where a speaker may start to talk, as it happens in overlap with ‘current’ speaker. There are three such positions of overlap onset. To understand how it is that a ‘next speaker’ can start speaking, whilst as it turns out the other is ‘still’ speaking, it is necessary to appreciate that a speaker’s turn is built out of turn construction units. There is already an extensive literature on turn construction units (referred to from here on as TCUs), so it is unnecessary to say more about them other than to remind you that a TCU may be a sound (*Aw:::*), a word, a phrase or clause, or a sentence.

These (syntactic units) are the building blocks of turns in conversation; and although a turn can consist of a single TCU (e.g. just a single word or phrase), commonly turns are built out of multiple TCUs (Ford et al. 1996). For instance, Sheila’s opening turn in line 1 and her enquiry in line 6 in example 5 consist of only

one TCU, *Hello:?* And *Zis Harriet?* However, her turn in lines 8 is built out of two TCUs, namely a greeting *Hi Harriet.*, to which she adds an answer to Harriet's enquiry about when Lila will be home, i.e. *about fi:ve.* We won't consider more carefully here whether her turn in line 3 consists of two or three TCUs; that is, whether or no her turn initial *nNo* and then subsequently *she's no:t.* are stand-alone units, or whether *nNo she's no:t* was designed and delivered to be a single unit (on the phonetics and other linguistic properties of TCU production, see Ford et al. 1996 a & b; Selting 2000).

(5) [MDE:60:1:6:1] (Harriet is a friend of Sheila's school-age daughter, Lila)

1	Sheila:	Hello:?
2	Harriet:	Hello is Lila home?
3	Sheila:	nNo she's no:t. She:'s et school.
4	Harriet:	Yeh d'you know what time she'd be back in t'day?
5		(0.2)
6	Sheila:	Zis Harriet?
7	Harriet:	Yeah.
8	Sheila:	<u>Hi Harriet.</u> <u>Uh about fi:ve.</u>

Turns constructed out of multiple turn units, that is two or more TCU, are the key to the occurrence of overlapping talk – and to the position of overlap onset. Very schematically at this stage, the principal positions in which a next speaker begins talking, only to find him/herself in overlap, are:

- Transition space onset: in the 'space' between one TCU and the next, that is in the transition space.
- Last item onset: that is, overlapping with the last (projected) item – usually word or syllable – of a TCU (immediately before the transition space).
- Post transition onsets: that is, immediately after a transition space, when the 'current' speaker has begun a next TCU.

In short, the three positions in which overlapping talk generally and principally occurs (remember, *begins* or onsets) all focus on the transition space between one construction unit and the next. They occur either right in that space, or

just before, or just after. We'll see that there is real precision to the occurrence of overlaps in these positions, to how it comes about that 'next' speakers begin speaking when they do. This precision arises from an orderliness to overlap onset, that is from the systematic basis a 'next' speaker has for starting to speak next.

In the remainder of this chapter I will outline and illustrate each of these positions; and then show a fourth category or type of overlap onset, in which speakers start up some way from a transition space (i.e. between transition spaces). Whilst these 'interjacent' overlaps do not share the precision and orderliness of the three main kinds, nevertheless they have a precision and orderliness of their own. But they are most like what is commonly regarded as 'interruption' in conversation.

This outline of the three principal positions in which overlap onsets occur, as well as the fourth type of interjacent onsets, derive from Jefferson's work, and particularly the key papers Jefferson 1973, 1983, 1986 and 2004. All that I am doing here is to pull together her findings across these papers, and slightly reassemble and re-order her typologies. Generally I am using different data examples than hers, just as an update using data with which scholars currently working in conversation analysis will be familiar – the corpora from which my examples are taken are the British and US English telephone and face-to-face conversations that are in wide circulation among conversation analysts. Otherwise, I am not adding anything to Jefferson's analysis, or reporting anything new; I am only explicating her account of the position of overlap onsets. It would be tedious and repetitive to cite the original version(s) of each point and analytic observation below in her publications; so I hope this disclaimer is sufficient to indicate that all of what follows can be found and has its origin in those four papers by Jefferson. What follows should, if possible, be read in conjunction with those papers.

Transition space onset

We saw that Sheila's turn in line 8 of (5) was constructed out of two TCUs, a greeting and an answer to Harriet's enquiry about when her friend would be home. In that excerpt I didn't show that just as Sheila completed the first TCU, and just as she begins the next/second TCU, Harriet begins speaking. That precise point of overlap onset is marked by the left square brackets, indicating that Harriet simultaneously

begins saying *Hi:*. – and thereby in overlap – with Sheila’s answer *Uh about fi:ve.*. Here’s the excerpt in full.

(6) [MDE:60:1:6:1] (Harriet is a friend of Sheila’s school-age daughter, Lila)

- 1 Sheila: Hello:?
2 Harriet: Hello is Lila home?
3 Sheila: nNo she’s no:t. She:’s et school.
4 Harriet: Yeh d’you know what time she’d be back in t’day?
5 (0.2)
6 Sheila: Zis Harriet?
7 Harriet: Yeah.
8 Sheila: Hi Harriet. [Uh about fi:ve.
9 Harriet: [Hi:.

Having now recognised the caller as her daughter’s friend Harriet (line 6) (Sheila’s try-marked recognition is confirmed by Harriet in line 7), Sheila does a recognitional greeting *Hi Harriet*. (line 8) (for an account of recognitional greetings in opening sequences, see Schegloff 1986; on their interactional trickiness, see Drew 2002). Precisely at the point at which Sheila completes her recognitional greeting, Harriet responds by reciprocating, also with a recognitional greeting *Hi:*. (line 9). As it happens, just as Harriet begins her reciprocal greeting, Sheila continues with her turn in line 8 with a new, next action, an answer to Harriet’s enquiry (line 4) about when Lila will be home, *Uh about fi:ve.*

Notice that each is well within her rights to speak when she does, in overlap in lines 8/9. Sheila has greeted her, so Harriet is entitled (indeed given the constraints of adjacency pairs, required) to greet her in return. Sheila, on the other hand, is entitled – again, since she’s been asked a question, ‘required’ – to answer Harriet’s enquiry. In this respect, the recognitional greetings sequences in lines 6–8 is inserted between Harriet’s question in line 4 and Sheila’s answer in line 8 (on insertion sequences, see Jefferson 1972; Schegloff 2007). It would not be possible to say that one interrupts the other; each has an entitlement to speak when she does (Harriet is entitled to respond to Sheila’s greeting; and Sheila is entitled to continue, to answer Harriet’s enquiry). They happen to collide, the collision arising from the intersection between two action sequences.

The overlap between Sheila and Harriet in this example can be summarised thus: the ‘next’ speaker (Harriet) begins speaking at a transition point, when as it happens the ‘current’ speaker (Sheila) continues.

Precisely this collision between a next speaker beginning to speak at a transition point, whilst the current speaker continues by adding a next unit to their turn, is further illustrated in these examples.

(7) [Her:OII:2:7:5]

1 Doreen: Yes well pop in on th'way back'n pick it up
 2 Katie: Thank you ve'y much eh ha-how are you all.
 3 [Yer a little ti:red] nah
 4 Doreen: [Oh we're all fi:ne] Yes I'm jus: sorta clearing up

(8) [NB:II:2:23]

1 Emm: Y'got any(b) fri:nd boyfri:nds? er any^othing
 2 [goin:g [steady'r:^o]
 3 Nan: [Oh::: [° h*ell n]*o.^o

(9) [NB:II:25]

1 Emm: I do t:oo I shoul^a had'm drop me off but I didn'know
 2 whether you w'r ho::me er no:t. [An:d] u h
 3 Nan: [Oh: :] Em:]ma e-Why'nche
 4 CA:::LL.

(10) [Rah:C:1:16:3-4]

1 Jen: 'n did you want anything in Middlesbruh
 2 Ida [or are you jis going [f'r the ri'.]
 3 Ida: [I : : : doh [I d o h n 't eeveh- ah h- ah have no
 4 money Jenny

Space does not allow us to consider each of these examples in detail. But notice that at precisely the points at which the 'next' speaker begins speaking (Doreen in line 4 of (7) Nancy in line 3 of (8); Nancy in line 3 of (9); and Ida in line 3 of (10)), the 'current' speaker has completed a unit. For instance, in (7), knowing that Doreen has had visitors staying, Katie has asked *how are you all.*: and in (10), *a propos* a trip she and Ida are going to make into a local city, Jenny asks *did you want anything in Middlesbruh Ida*. As it happens, in each case the current speaker adds something to her turn, either by adding a new unit (e.g. the solicitous *Yer a little ti:red* in (7) line 3), or by continuing. Their continuations may be explicit, as in the conjunctive markers *and* and *or* in (9) line 2 and (10) line 2; or incremental, as in (8) line 2.

In these examples speakers end up speaking in overlap when the recipient/'next' speaker begins to respond to a completed question or enquiry ((7), (8) and (10)), or

does a fitted response to the action in the current speaker's turn (Nancy's regretful response in (9)). In doing so, each did not anticipate that the current speaker would continue by adding something to a potentially completed unit, or by adding a new unit to their turn. Hence the 'next' speaker begins in a possible transition space – a point at which 'current' speaker may have completed their turn, though as it happens, they – quite legitimately – add something to the 'completed' unit/turn.

It might seem at first sight that the following case (11) is quite different from the transition space onsets considered so far. Bearing in mind the precision with which 'next' speakers begin in the transition space in (6)–(10), it might appear that in (11) Nancy begins just too soon, just before the transition space – so is this imprecision, or sloppiness on her part?

(11) [NB:II:2:2]

1	Nan:	Well I'm glad ih didn'ha:ppen while <u>you</u> were tryin tuh get o:ff,
2	Emm:	h <u>Oh</u> : my Go :::d hh
3	Nan:	[God <u>that</u> w'd'v been a mess you'd a'never
4		got'n tuh <u>Hawaii</u> ,

When in line 3 Nancy begins to say *God*, she overlaps with the last sound of Emma's exclamatory *Go::d* in line 2; so Nancy doesn't begin precisely on completion of *hOh: my Go::d hh*, but seemingly a little early. Indeed this might seem to be a case of the second category listed above, of last item onset.

But notice that Emma has extended the vowel in *Go::d* in line 2 (the *hh* after this indicates only some audible aspiration). Had she not done so, Nancy would have been starting to speak (in line 3) precisely on completion of Emma's *God*, right at the transition point, and in the clear. This case illustrates how a 'next' speaker may aim for the transition space, anticipating the completion of the word and hence of the TCU: however, she does not anticipate that the current speaker would extend or lengthen the sound of the last word in the TCU – and thereby ends up colliding with the end of that last sound in the TCU. Still, the 'next' speaker was aiming to begin precisely at the end of the TCU, in the transition space.

Here are just three further examples, to highlight how speakers can find themselves speaking (momentarily, usually) in overlap, even though the 'next' speaker is aiming to begin in the clear.

(12) [Trip to Syracuse]

1 Ile: Hullo:.,
2 (0.3)
3 Cha: hHello is eh::m:: (0.2) .hh-.hh Ilene there?
4 Ile: Ya::h, this is Ile:[ne,
5 Cha: [.hh Oh hi this's Charlie about th'trip te
6 Syracuse?

(13) [Holt:2:12]

1 Les: W'l Gordon's got quite a deep voice now,
(3 lines omitted)
5 Joy: I meant to've said t'you this afternoo:n. .hh
6 Yih don't realize how they're all growing u: [p,
7 Les: [No:.

(14) [Holt:1:1:6]

1 Mum: She's got a ba:d meh- uh long mem'ry abou:t (0.2) that
2 sort'v thing now what do you think the people here'v got
3 long mem'ries abou:t.
4 Les: [Ye:s that's ri:ght.

It should be clear enough, without further explanation, that the 'next' speaker just catches the tail of the final word in the 'current' speaker's TCU, when the 'current' speaker happens to lengthen the sound on that last word. Because the 'next' speaker was aiming for the transition space, these can be considered to be transition space onsets, along with cases such as (6)–(10). These contrast with the next type, of last item onsets, in which it appears that 'next' speakers are not aiming for the transition space, only to be confounded by the lengthening of that last word/item.

Last item onset

The next of the principal positions of overlap onset, the next category of what can generate overlapping talk, is last item onsets; that is, when a 'next' speaker begins talking in overlap with the last item – usually the last word, but in some cases a last unit (such as *a year* in [20]) – of the 'current' speaker's turn.

(15) [NB:II:2]

1 Emm: u.-theh I c'd see the bui:lding en then the Wo:rld
2 Airways wz uh: .hhh on the side there whur it comes
3 in en that's ↑js where ↑we took o:ff
4 Nan: W'l ah'll be da[rned]

5 Emm: [Ye::]ah,

(16) [Her:01:2:2]

1 Jean: So well they won't be here Boxing **[Day?**
2 Doreen: **[Oh** well that doesn't
3 matter...

(17) [Holt:X(C):2:1:2:6:3]

1 Les: eeYe:- uh-we:ll u-hu- ↑Well thank you very much f'my
2 Christmas **[present,**
3 Joa: **[Oh::** pleasure,

(18) [SCC:DCD:23]

1 Sokol: Ah'll tell you 'ow she does i:t? .hhh That's all sewn
2 together by **[ha:nd**
3 Bryant: **[I thought** this w'z a very expensive (business)

(19) [NB:II:2:1]

1 Emm: Y'*oughta go sh*o:pping,
2 Nan: .hhhh Well I should but (.) yihknow et eight dollars a
3 mo:[n : th :]
4 Emm: [hm hm][h hm-m-hm.]
5 Nan: [anything I' d] buy'd (.) be using up my raise fer
6 'alf [**a ↑YEA:R:**] ((smile voice))
7 Emm: [**Y e : a : h.**]

In each case, the recipient's response overlaps just with the last word or 'item' in the first speaker's turn. So in (15) Emma's response to Nancy's exclamation (an acknowledgement confirming that Nancy has correctly seen the significance of the coincidence she's reported; see lines 4 and 5) overlaps with the last word of that exclamation, *darned*. Then in (16) Doreen begins her response to Jean's news that *they won't be here Boxing Day?* in overlap with the last word of that news. The overlaps in (17) and (18) are positioned in exactly the same way. And in (19) the overlap between lines 6/7 occurs when the recipient (Emma) responds whilst the first speaker (Nancy) is 'completing' her unit/turn (...*half a year*).

Evidently, the recipients/'next' speakers in these examples were not aiming to begin at a transition space, precisely at the end of the prior speaker's TCU/turn. They are coming in a little early. There are three points worth noticing about these examples.

First, though beginning to speak a ‘little early’, there is a certain precision to how early. ‘Next’ speaker is beginning in overlap with the start of, on during, the last item of the first speaker’s turn.

Second, in each case, there is a specific basis on which the recipient may be able to anticipate that that will be the last item. They can anticipate either precisely the word which will complete current speaker’s TCU, or the kind of word it will be – sufficiently, at any rate, to be able to project where/when the current speaker will have completed their turn. Notice that in each case, the last word is from a standard, formulaic or routinised phrase, *I’ll be darned*, *Boxing Day*, *sown together by hand* and *half a year*. Thus it very commonly happens that recipients are beginning to speak in overlap with the end of a current speaker’s turn, at just the point where they can anticipate what the current speaker is in the course of saying – and that that will complete their turn.

Third, these overlapping responses are broadly affirming, or affiliative; in each case the recipient is agreeing or aligning with the other in some way. These are not oppositional, hostile or disaffiliative responses. We know from previous research on preferred (affiliative, cohesive) responsive actions that they are done promptly, even a little early, in overlap; whilst dispreferred (disaffiliative) responses tend to be delayed (Pomerantz 1984; Heritage 1984: 265–280; Schegloff 1988).

Taken together, these observations underline how far the generation of overlapping talk in these cases, onsetting with the last item in a current speaker’s talk, are from what is generally regarded as competitive ‘interruptions’. Recipients are not attempting to close the current speaker’s turn down; they can see (anticipate) that the speaker is about to complete their turn. They can do so on the basis of the relatively ‘fixed’ character of the phrase with which current speaker is completing her turn. The onsets are precisely timed/placed, in overlap with only the last item, so recipients are not being sloppy or inattentive. And the recipient is responding affirmatively, and not in any disaffiliative, hostile way; affirmative or affiliative (preferred) responses tend not to be delayed but instead are done early, just before the completion of the turn with which recipient is agreeing or aligning.

The same observations apply to cases in which the overlapping talk is somewhat more extensive than in (15)–(19). For instance in (20) the overlap between Jenny’s incoming response and Vera’s initial turn might seem to involve more than just the last item in Vera’s turn.

(20) Rah:B:2:14:5]

1 Ver: They mucked intuh biscuits.=They had (.) quite a
2 lotta biscuit[s'n **chee:::se,**]
3 Jen: [Oh: well that's it th]en

Jenny's response overlaps not just *chee:::se*, and more even than *n'chee:::se*; Jenny begins in the last sibilant of *biscuits* (all line 2). This may seem to be unduly picky, to be quibbling about a tiny detail. But the detail here involves just how precisely Jenny begins her response. If *chee:::se* is the last item in Vera's turn, as it might appear to be, then her response onsets just a little before a last item; and that's not so precise.

However, it seems that Jenny is anticipating that Vera's turn will end with *biscuits* in line 2, on the basis that Vera is bringing her turn (and her account of the food her grandchildren ate on their last day staying with her) to completion by repeating *biscuits*, i.e. *They mucked intuh biscuits*. = *They had (.) quite a lotta biscuits*. Repetition is a commonly-used practice for bringing a turn or story or topic to a close. So anticipating, when she hears Vera repeat *biscuits*, that she is completing her turn, and indeed that *biscuits* will be the last item in Vera's turn, Jenny begins her (affiliative) response. In doing so, she has not anticipated that Vera would continue, incrementally, to add *n'chee:::se*. Had Vera not added that, the extent of the resulting overlap would have been minimal.

One further case will have to suffice to illustrate the overlaps which can occur when a recipient anticipates that a turn is approaching completion, begins speaking in what they treat as the last item in that turn, but as it happens the current speaker continues – which had *not* been anticipated by the recipient.

(21)

1 Alan: W'l b- bring a change a'clothes yih c'n use
2 the ba:th[r'm d'change
3 Mary: [Okhhay ghhood,

Again, the current speaker's (Alan's) turn was projectibly complete after *ba:thr'm* (i.e. bathroom); that could reasonably be the end of that TCU and hence of Alan's turn. Instead Alan adds the increment *d'change* (i.e. *to change*) after that possible completion, thereby extending his turn, and extending also the overlap between his talk and Mary's. Once again, one couldn't say that either or them is 'interrupting' the

other. The recipient has legitimate grounds for anticipating that a word will bring about the completion of current speaker's turn – will be the last item in that turn; whilst the current speaker is quite entitled to add a word or phrase to complete what has been produced thus far.

The two 'sets' we've been considering of overlaps onsetting with the last item in a current speaker's turn arise when a recipient has a good basis to anticipate that the turn is about to come to completion – that this word will be the last in the turn. There is a final set termed 'recognitional' onsets; in these, recipients begin responding early, on a last 'item' (which can include a single word, or a formulaic or standard phrase/expression), at a point where they recognise where the current speaker is heading – and recognise also that what current speaker is saying in some way does not apply or is not apt. In (22) for example, focusing on the overlap between lines 4/5 (the other overlap in lines 2/3 is an instance of the first type, a transition space onset, reviewed earlier) Doreen is asking Helen (who has recently moved house) for her new telephone number. Recognising that this is where Doreen's turn is heading, Helen begins in the last item (in the standard phrase *telephone number*)

(22) [Heritage:1:6:9]

1	Doreen:	<u>If</u> by any chance, (0.8) theh isn't anybody heuh I've got
2		tih go out jus' fer aw <i>hi</i> :le, [.hh <u>What</u> is your- new-
3	Helen:	[Ye:s
4	Doreen:	<u>What is</u> your telee[phone numbuh?
5	Helen:	[Well we're not on the phone yet

Helen's overlapping response in line 5 indicates that Doreen's question is inapt, since they don't have a telephone.

Similarly, in (23) Geri can anticipate that Shirley will give two times, *between eleven and (a time, like 'eleven thirty')*. So midway through *eleven* she can anticipate what remains to complete Shirley's turn. Even though Geri cannot anticipate precisely how long Shirley was trying their number, she can tell already that Shirley's question (about who she was talking to earlier) is inapposite, since irrespective of how long it was, their line was not engaged. She wasn't talking to anybody (which is what Shirley asks about in line 1); her phone was simply 'left off the hook' and therefore her number was unobtainable.

(23) [Fr:TC:1:1:2]

- 1 Shi: .hhh Uh:m, .tch.hhhh Who w'yih ↑ta:lkɪŋ to:
 2 (0.6)
 3 Ger: Jis no:w?
 4 Shi: .hhh No I called be- like between ele[ven en
 5 Ger: [I: wasn'talkeen tuh
 6 a:nybuddy. (b) Bo-oth Marla'n I slept 'ntil about noo:n,
 ((continues with account of waking up, picking up the phone,
 thinking it was out of order – when it was just that *Marla left
 the phone off the hook*))

These cases have in common that a recipient recognises that what the other is saying or asking is in some respect inapposite, or does not apply. They are not waiting until the enquiry is fully formed and complete; the display of its being inapposite is managed, in part, through the recipient starting early – starting before the current speaker's turn is complete, indicating that in a sense no answer is possible. Nevertheless, the recipient's turn onsets only on a 'last item' in the current speaker's turn; not, perhaps, on the last word (as in the previous set), but a last phrase or unit.

Post-transition onsets

In previous sections we have considered overlapping talk that onset right *in* the transition space at the end of a 'current' speaker's TCU, and before a next TCU begins (so that a 'current' speaker begins his/her next TCU simultaneously with the next speaker's incoming) ; and next speaker's talk that begins (onsets) just before the transition point, i.e. on the last item of the 'current' speaker's TCU, usually the projectable last word in that turn. The third principal position of overlap onset is immediately after the transition point, just as the 'current' speaker continues with a next TCU. These are, therefore, post transition onsets.

In (24) Emma is explaining to her sister Lottie a difficulty that has arisen concerning family arrangements for getting together at Thanksgiving; for reasons that need not concern us here, her husband will no longer be able to take their daughter (Barbara) to the bus depot at the end of the weekend. She reports this as a problem (*I don't know what to do about Barbara....she was depending on him...*) (lines 1–3). Parsing the construction of Emma's turn, it is evident that it is potentially complete after *Sundee* (i.e. Sunday), at the end of line 3. That is the end of the TCU, and therefore a transition point.

(24) [NB:IV:4:4]

1 Emm: W'l anyway tha:t's a'dea:l so I don'know wut tih do about
2 Ba:rbra .hhhhh (0.2) c'z you see she w'z: depending on:
3 him takin'er in tuh the L.A. deeple s:- depot Sundee
4 **So** ['e siz]
5 Lot: [Ah:'ll] take'er in: Sundee,

Emma and Lottie end up speaking in overlap in lines 4/5, when Lottie makes an offer which would resolve Emma's problem (to take Barbara to the bus depot), but does so just after Emma had begun to continue her turn, *So 'e siz* (i.e. so he says) (line 4).

Note that the beginning of this next TCU by Emma is constructed precisely as a continuation, with the conjunctive *So*. Lottie's 'spontaneous' offer of assistance is delivered at just the point at which she is able to see that Emma is going to continue, i.e. immediately after *So*. By continuing, the 'current' speaker (Emma) might take the talk in a direction away from the immediate problem, in which case the opportunity to offer assistance 'spontaneously' might be lost. Therefore Lottie is coming in to make her offer at a point when she can see that Emma might take the conversation away from this immediate opportunity to offer to help (such offers properly being done now, not later: for more on the interactional management and format of offers, see Curl 2006).

The overlapping talk begins, therefore, just post the transition point, when the 'current' speaker has resumed her turn and continued her talk – with the potential of moving away from an opportunity for the recipient (Lottie) to respond appropriately to the turn-so-far (i.e. with an offer of assistance, in response to Emma's report of a problem she has).

These same features, or properties, of post-transition onsets are evident in further examples, shown below. Although the specific action sequence involved differs in each, they all involve a recipient seeing that 'current' speaker is going to continue; and that therefore an opportunity might be missed to respond in some appropriate way to whatever has (just) been completed in the current speaker's turn-thus-far.

(25) [NB:II:2:13]

1 Emm: u-Oh:: I've go:t s'm Christmas stu:ff en I:'ve got (.)
2 Oh: .hh- .hh-.hhh s'm dishes my sister'n law gay me fer:
3 SHRIMP STUFF en I don'wah I jis doh wan'take it outta
4 the draw::ers **I j**'s

5 Nan: [I: **wouldn't?** Why dihyuh haf to.
 6 (0.2)
 7 Emm: En I'm gunnuh lea:ve I: think ah'll ev'n leave some
 8 a'these BLA:nkets.

(26) [SBL:3:1:3]

1 Cla: W'l you ca:n't e: enchiladas 'n all thetu stuff
 2 Marylou:~? requires a lo:tta spa:ce:..
 3 **Ah me**[a:n i h hhh
 4 Mar: [**Specially** if yer gonna have it open fuh the public,

(27) [NB:II:2:]

1 Emm: Bud js left't'play go:lf he's gotta go tuh Riverside=
 2 Nan: =[O h : .]
 3 Emm: =['nna comp'n]y dea:l so, .t.h[hhhhh
 4 Nan: [Oh:~?
 5 Emm: ↑**GOD** [i t' s b i h-]
 6 Nan: [**Tuh** River]side tihda:y?
 7 Emm: .hhh Yeah they: theh gun'tee off et twelve...

(In (27) I have highlighted the overlap that is the focus here, involving a post-transition onset, to distinguish it from two other overlaps, in lines 2/3 and 3/4. These others are both cases of the first type reviewed in the section on transition space onsets; though the explanation of that for Nancy's second overlap, her *Oh:~?* in line 4, is not in point here.)

In each case, the recipient starts to speak only just after the 'current' speaker has resumed or continued with a next TCU, i.e. *Ij* in (25), *Ah me* in (26) and *GOD* in (27). Pretty much as soon as it becomes evident that the current speaker is going to continue, the recipient pulls back, as it were, to respond to the prior, completed unit in the 'current' speaker's turn.

Echoing points made earlier about the affiliative character of recipients' responses when overlapping with the last item of a current speaker's TCU (see above section 6), notice that in each case of these post-transition onsets recipients are responding in supportive, affiliative, affirmative ways ((27) might be rather more 'neutral' in this respect, since Nancy is only displaying her surprise that Emma's husband would be playing golf today; though in doing so, Nancy is perhaps displaying also a solicitous knowledge about when Bud generally plays golf). In each of (24)–(26) recipients responses are actually rather strongly supportive of the other, either in offering assistance, as we have seen, or affiliating with the other's suggestion

or position. It is worth highlighting how commonly affiliation is involved in overlapping talk, in view of the widespread association there seems to be in the research literature between ‘interruption’ and hostility.

Post-transition onsets that aren’t! ‘Latency’ in overlap onset

In the post-transition onsets reviewed so far, the recipient/’next speaker’ has begun speaking, in overlap, with a turn that takes the opportunity to respond to a ‘current’ speaker’s completed turn and action. In responding to that action, the recipient takes a full turn, with a complete TCU (as in *Ah:’ll take’er in: Sundee* in (24)). Jefferson identified cases in which, curiously, recipients seem to begin to speak, apparently post-transition and in overlap, but then immediately drop out: so having started, they do not complete their turn (Jefferson 1986; as far as I know, no-one else has ever researched or written about this). Jefferson expressed it thus: “The question was, what on earth is this? They start up after it is obvious that someone is continuing, and then do this ‘oops sorry’ and drop out” (Jefferson 1986: 161). Here’s one of the cases she showed.

(28) [Fr:US:43:2]

1 Mike: Least’e c’d’v done w’z c’m down::n en letchu know w’t
 2 happ’n **Hey** [look yih gla:ss broke,
 3 James: [**Tha:t-**

The first completion point in Mike’s turn occurs after *happ’n* (beginning of line 2), *Least he could have done was come down and let you know what happened* being a complete unit (TCU). When Mike continues with *Hey* in line 2, he starts a new TCU. James begins in precisely the same post-transition position illustrated in previous cases, after just a word (*Hey*), from which James can tell that Mike is continuing. But by contrast with previous cases in which the next speaker has taken the opportunity to respond to the prior completed unit/action, here – finding himself speaking in overlap with Mike – James drops out (notice the cut-off on *Tha:t-* in line 3).

Here are three further examples.

(29) [GTS:1:1:50:1-2]

1 Dan: It is part a’the function a’th’group to begin d’share

2 in some a'these things **so**]: the others c'n understand
3 Roger: [W'1

(30) [Her:III:1:4:2]

1 Desk: Just one moment I'll uh he's in uh-actually in surgery
2 et the moment **I'll** [see'f I c'n get hold of him,
3 Heath: [ee-

(31) [SCC:DCD:9]

1 Phipps: Didju hev it ma:de (0.3) ju- soon ahftih you bought th'
2 m'terial? Or or lay::tuh. **Was i**[t in]Febru'ry:
3 Sokol: [W'1 I]

It is unnecessary to explicate each example in detail; but just to take one, to consolidate our understanding of where these brief overlaps are located. In (30) Heath overlaps with Desk (see lines 2 and 3), with - *ee-*, the beginning of something that is discontinued. Desk has completed a unit, an explanation (*he's in uh-actually in surgery et the moment*). She then continues her turn by repeating what she began but then suspended for that explanation, *I'll* (see the self-repair in line 1 and the resumption or retrieval in line 2). So when having completed the inserted unit, the explanation, Desk repeats *I'll* in line 2, she is starting a next unit. Heath begins to speak immediately after Desk's *I'll*, but having uttered only a sound of what he was about to say, drops out.

In these examples, 'next' speakers begin to say something just after a transition point, but they drop out when they find themselves starting up in overlap with a current speaker who is continuing. In such cases, it appears that a 'next speaker' is beginning to speak post the transition point, so that these would seem to be post-transition onsets. However, Jefferson's argument (Jefferson 1986) is that in fact they are transition space onsets. Her explanation is that in the normal course of speaker transfer in the speech exchange system Sacks et al. (1974) described, transitions from one speaker to a next occur with minimum gap and overlap. Such 'smooth' transfers between speakers are achieved by the next speaker aiming to leave a brief space between the completion of the current/previous speaker's turn, and the one that the next speaker is about to take. Jefferson describes a 'brief space' as a beat. During that brief intra-turn silence lasting a beat, the one who is about to speak changes from being a recipient of talk, to becoming a producer of talk – a speaker. During the changeover that occurs in this beat of time, that recipient-and-now-to-be-speaker is in

what Jefferson depicts as a blind spot; “He is no longer in recipient orientation, but in a state of speakership, although he is not yet producing sounds” (1986:164). So the ‘next’ speaker is gearing up to speak, leaving a beat of time to elapse after the completion of the prior speaker’s turn – a systematic ‘latency’ in the ‘next’ speaker’s talk which happens to generate overlapping talk. That beat of time, and its associated blind spot, is the ‘space’ after which the ‘next’ speaker begins to speak; but having done so, they find that the prior/current speaker is continuing, and hence they (‘next’ speakers) drop out.

In other words, the ‘next’ speaker is aiming to begin speaking just after – a beat after – the current speaker has finished speaking. However, in what would otherwise have been a brief intra-turn silence, the current speaker continues. There is therefore a very brief delay before the ‘next’ speaker begins to speak, by which time current speaker has continued, the ‘next’ speaker finds she/he was mistaken and so drops out. The ‘next’ speaker is, therefore, aiming to begin in the transition space. These are not therefore being produced post-transition, as they might appear to be, but are being produced to occur in ‘unmarked next position’, happening “to collide with a current speaker’s producing further talk” (Jefferson 1986: 164). So although I have discussed the ‘latency’ Jefferson identified, in cases which seem related somehow to post-transition onsets – because that’s what they look like – you should haul these back in your mind to the earlier section on transition-space onsets. And I’ve given only a very simplified account of Jefferson’s exploration of this latency; with this background, you’d be well advised to read her article (which can be downloaded from her website, <http://www.liso.ucsb.edu/Jefferson/>) (see also <http://www.gail-jefferson.com/>).

‘Interjacent’ overlap

So far I have described what are broadly speaking three main positions or locations where overlapping talk begins, or onsets; in the transition space, just before the transition space (last-item onset), and just after the transition space (post-transition). Instead of chaos, we find that overlapping talk is systematically associated with participants’ close, fine-grained orientation to one another’s talk, and particularly to when and how another’s turn at talk might be complete. The orderliness of overlap onset is the product of, and generated through, participants’ analysis of the points at which another’s talk may be complete, and hence at which they might begin speaking.

Overlapping talk begins, to a very considerable extent, in close proximity to turn transition points.

But not all overlapping talk does so. It does happen that speakers begin speaking whilst another is speaking, at points where the ‘current’ speaker cannot be close to completing their turn (i.e. at a point which is distant, in some fashion, from a completion or transition point). Here is an example.

(32) MDE:60:1:3:1]

- | | | |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | Sheila: | What time did'e get on the pl _a :ne. |
| 2 | Tom: | Uh::: (0.2) I: don't know exactly I think ih w'z arou:nd |
| 3 | | three uh'clock er something a'that sort. |
| 4 | | (0.2) |
| 5 | Sheila: | Oh: maybe he g[ot s'm |
| 6 | Tom: | [He took it et fou:r. Gerda says. |

When Tom begins speaking in line 6, Sheila has plainly not completed a TCU, nor is she close to completing a unit/her turn. She's just begun some kind of surmise about the arrival of the person she's asked about (their son), and why he might be late (e.g. *maybe he got caught in the traffic on the freeway back from the airport...*). Tom cuts in well after Sheila has begun *Oh maybe he g...*, plainly not close to the completion of what she's saying, and too far into her ‘surmising’ (if that's what it was going to be).

Tom begins speaking, therefore, during the course of the production of a TCU, ‘between’ transition points, not close to or next to – not adjacent to – a possible completion and transition point. He begins speaking ‘interruptively’ in Sheila's turn. But Jefferson coined the term ‘interjacent’ overlap onsets to describe a case such as this (and others; again for the fuller picture see Jefferson 1986), a term designed to replace the morally loaded ‘interruption’ with one which more technically described their placement or position in the turn. So instead of describing these as ‘interruptions’, which conveys almost a motive for interjecting and beginning to speak whilst another is speaking, Jefferson recommended a term that described simply, and technically, where in a current speaker's turn another begins and interjects.

To appreciate the importance of describing, and accounting for, overlap in as morally neutral and thereby technical way as can be found, we should consider Tom's interjection – and its placement or position in Sheila's turn. Sheila and Tom are no longer married; they now live in cities some distance apart, and having evidently been

visiting Tom, their son has flown back home to Sheila earlier that afternoon. In response to Sheila having asked when their son ‘got on the plane’ (line 1), Tom is uncertain (line 2), but estimate that the flight left around 3 o’clock (line 3). Now, with that information, Sheila evidently begins trying to figure out why he might be delayed getting home (as I said earlier, surmising perhaps about getting caught up with something on the way back from the airport). Whilst Sheila is underway surmising what might have happened to cause the delay, Tom finds that the estimate he gave, about when their son’s flight left, is wrong. His partner (Gerda), who apparently is co-present with him and must have heard him tell Sheila that it was 3 o’clock, has told Tom that it was 4 o’clock (line 6). That hour makes a difference; it may be that if his flight left at 3pm, it is taking him longer than would be expected to arrive home; if, however, he left at 4pm, then he’s probably on his way. Given that Sheila is evidently searching for an explanation for their son being delayed, as soon as he learns (from Gerda) the correct departure time, he cuts in to correct what he said previously to Sheila. In doing so, he saves Sheila the trouble of continuing to figure out why their son is delayed – the point being that he’s not.

Tom’s action here, intercepting Sheila’s search for a reason for their son’s delay, is co-operative. Were he to have let Sheila continue with what he now knows would be a fruitless search (for a reason for a non-existent circumstance), he’d be misleading her. (There is a range of idioms for this situation, such as ‘hanging her out to dry’, ‘leading her up the garden path’, ‘stringing her along’; they all capture something nasty – knowingly allowing someone to proceed on the basis of some erroneous belief.) So not to have intercepted when he did would have been mistaken, ‘hostile’ in some fashion; by correcting himself when he did, speaking ‘interjacently’ when Sheila was speaking, he is being co-operative in saving her the trouble of explaining something that doesn’t need explaining.

Here are some further examples of overlapping talk beginning interjacently during another’s turn.

(33) [NB:II:4:8] (Nancy met a man yesterday evening)

1	Nan:	He's jɪst a ri:l sweet GU*:y..h.t [.hhhhh
2	Emm:	[↑WONderf*ul.
3	Nan:	↑So: we w'r [s*itting in]
4	Emm:	[YER LIFE]is CHANG[ing
5	Nan:	[↑↑EEYE::A:H

(34) [Holt:SO88(II):1:3:]

1 Les: ...it's just c'z these Italian: fellow's come
 2 over .hh[h an'
 3 Hal: [Oh ee have the:y.=
 4 Les: =iYe[:s.
 5 Hal [Yeh
 6 Les: .hhh And so that's why we're [a bit-
 7 Hal: [(But-)
 8 (0.3)
 9 Les: -hh
 10 Hal: Ah- (0.2) Oh interruptin' you I w'z g'nna say you could
 leave it...

(35) [From Hutchby 1996:80] (A particularly combative radio call-in show, London)

1 Caller: I: Well if- well I suppo:se so yes but I mean if
 2 it go:es to charity but we're not told that
 3 (.) But I mean I [don't know (the-)
 4 Host: [Well what d'you think it's going to.
 5 Caller: I've no- 'aven't a clu::e,
 6 (.)
 7 Host: E:r, well if you haven't a clu::e, you m[ight
 8 Caller: [Ye:h well I mean
 9 whe:re d'you [think it's going to.
 10 Host: [you- you [might've I think it's going to charity.
 11 Caller: Yeh but you don't know do you.

In (33) Nancy is telling Emma about a man she met the day before (line 1), and is evidently going to tell something further about the circumstances in which he asked her for a date (*So we were sitting in...*, line 3). Intersecting early in Nancy's narrative Emma expands her previous exclamation (*Wonderful*, line 2), adding that *your life is changing* (line 4) – overlapping at a point where Nancy has plainly not completed a TCU or her turn.

Similarly, Lesley is beginning an explanation in (34), *so that's why we're a bit*, when Hal interjects with his suggestion (lines 6 and 7) at a point in Lesley's turn where it is plainly incomplete. This example is shown as a reminder that 'interrupting' is a lay description of an action (see Schegloff 1996 on lay and analytic descriptions of actions), as when a participant describes an action as having been an interruption. Here Hal attributes that to his own action, *Oh interrupting you* (line 10).

Finally the multiple interjacent overlaps in (35) between the host of a radio phone-in programme and a caller – they are arguing about whether the money raised during 'telethons' really goes to the charities for which it is ostensibly being raised – illustrate the kind of competitive, hostile, perhaps argumentative overlapping talk that

is regarded as ‘interrupting’ another speaker (for more on which, see Schegloff 2000). Each of the overlaps when the host interjects in lines 4 and 10, and when the caller does so in line 8, onsets far from any possible transition place. Sometimes there is quasi-syntactic evidence for the incompleteness of the current speaker’s turn, as when in line 7 the host constructs his turn as a conditional sentence. After the conditional clause *well if you haven’t a clue*, it is evident that the main clause is yet to come (and has only been begun with *you might*). Hence the caller begins his turn at a point where there is plainly more to come (i.e. the rest of the main clause) (on the importance that the syntax of turns in progress can have for interaction, see e.g. Lerner 1991).

The kind of overlaps illustrated in this section, which result when a ‘next’ speaker begins speaking ‘in the middle of’ another’s turn – that is, not in or close (adjacent) to a transition point, and therefore ‘interjacent’ – are perhaps closest to what might be regarded as ‘interruptive’. For instance that might seem to be the basis on which Hal can attribute *interrupting* to his incoming in line 7 of (34). But some caution is necessary, since ‘interruption’ – together with the hostile, argumentative, disputatious character often attributed to interrupting – is a quality or function not only of the incoming (i.e. the point of overlap onset), but also of whether speakers continue to speak simultaneously, and thereby compete for the turn. These issues concerning what happens after the overlap onset, and the competitions that can ensue between speakers for the floor, are discussed elsewhere (see especially Schegloff 2000). Here I have focused only on where/when precisely overlapping talk begins.

Conclusion

I have aimed to show two things here. First, I have tried to show why it is inappropriate to describe all and any instances of simultaneous speech – when two (or more) speakers are speaking at the same time, in overlap with one another – as ‘interruption’. As a moral vernacular account, rather than a technical, analytic term, it attributes a certain character to (verbal) conduct. It conveys something of the illegitimacy of a turn incursion, of a transgression in beginning to speak before another had finished. Thus although ‘interruption’ might seem to capture some of the properties of ‘interjacent’ onsets, illustrated in the previous section, it might really be more fruitful to consider how participants themselves use the term, in describing their own conduct, as in example (34), or in describing the conduct of others (as in

complaining about their conduct, *Don't interrupt me*, or *You're always interrupting me*). That is not the direction I have pursued here; but I hope to have added to what has already been said against 'interruption' (again, see e.g. Drummond 1989; Jefferson 1986; Schegloff 2000), sufficiently to outlaw the term as a technical category in analyzing interaction. In any case, part of the moral baggage which the term 'interruption' carries is the assumption that it is always the 'next' incoming speaker's fault, and that it is somehow an aggressive or hostile action. I hope it is now clear that neither of these is the case; there is no fault to be assigned in these overlap onset positions, and the majority of examples we have reviewed involve co-operative, supportive conduct.

My second and principal aim has been to show – through a comparative analysis of precisely where in a 'current' speaker's turn at talk a 'next' speaker begins speaking – that overlapping talk is not at all the result of some failure by participants in conversation. These (usually brief) moments of speaking together are not the results of failures to listen to one another carefully; failures to adhere to the rules of conversation, and especially the 'one at a time' rule; or failures to take account of the rights a current speaker might have. Moments of overlapping talk result not from the chaos which is often attributed to them, to some breakdown in conversational practices and rules; rather the reverse. When we examine closely precisely where a next speaker begins to speak, in relation to the construction of the (ongoing) turn into which they seem to interject, we find a considerable orderliness. Overlapping talk onsets – begins – primarily at one of three positions; in a transition space, and just before and just after a transition space – where 'just' indicates one word or short phrase. Overlap onsets are therefore orderly insofar as they are generated systematically from the same procedures for managing smooth (no/minimal gap, no/minimal overlap) turn transition from one speaker to a next. Overlaps arise not from sloppiness, but from 'next' speakers' exquisitely close attention to what the other is saying. Overlaps do not represent breakdowns in conversational orderliness and organisation; instead they embody and are generated by precisely the procedures that make orderliness possible – at least at the level of turn-taking.

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