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Communication Phenomena as Solutions to Interactional Problems

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In his chapter, Beach takes up issues surrounding what could constitute a "phenomenon" for communication studies. He poses a number of questions for himself and for research on interaction concerning the nature of communication phenomena. In this response to Beach, I take up the issue of what we, as communication researchers, could mean by a communication "phenomenon." Beach's assumption is that a phenomenon located in interaction, oriented to by speakers and hearers, is to be counted as a phenomenon for communication studies. His chapter treats issues pertaining to what a phenomenon might consist of, and how one might go about locating one, proposing conversation analysis (CA) as a suitable method for locating and developing a phenomenon. He then provides some observations about a fragment of courtroom interaction. As Beach proposes, just what a "communication phenomenon" might consist of is a difficult problem. His discussion raises the question of what we mean by a phenomenon: For scholars in speech communication, what counts as a phenomenon worthy of note and study? Further, how might we best go about producing an account of a phenomenon?

In a sense, that we should need to ask this question is curious. For if communication phenomena are "real" — that is, existing in the real world — surely they should be available to the naked eye or ear, or amenable to the research tool. If we are having problems identifying phenomena, could it be that we are somehow ap-

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proaching communication in a way that does not assist us in seeing or hearing the stuff of which it is made? Like the goldfish to whom water is imperceptible, is our medium (or Lebenswelt) transparent to us? Much of the research currently published in leading communication journals attends to factors that affect communication and how communication affects psychological and social factors, in contrast with a focus upon the structures and characteristics of communication itself. The multiplicity of definitions of communication (Dance, 1970) suggests the problematic nature of what is to constitute “communication” for the field.

Beach’s chapter proposes that a possible solution to these problems lies in examining ordinary interaction. In this commentary I examine this solution, suggesting ways in which the features of talk in interaction can be seen as intrinsically communication phenomena, and taking a next turn in the dialogue Beach begins about how conversation presents us with communication phenomena, and how we might go about developing accounts of them that are cumulative with communication theory and research. I begin by proposing a way in which features of interaction may be treated as communication phenomena. I then distinguish between different “orders” of phenomena available for inspection, both in Beach’s observations about his data and in published conversation analytic research. Next, by reexamining parts of the data fragment Beach presents in his chapter, I suggest how we might begin to identify a phenomenon in ordinary conversation, and how observations about that phenomenon might be developed subsequent to its initial discovery.

THE STATUS OF CONVERSATIONAL PHENOMENA AS COMMUNICATION PHENOMENA

“Talk in interaction” seems to be a natural candidate for the location of raw communication phenomena, for interaction may be seen as “the primordial site of sociality”—that is, as the locus of, and means through which, much of our communicative activity gets done (Schegloff, 1987a). How do we communicate? We communicate through talk and through the body behaviors accompanying that talk. If this interactional activity is indeed foundational to concerted social action, then perhaps scrutiny of it might yield communication phenomena that are “real” not just for researchers, but for communicators also. If we examine interaction up close and in detail, we may be able to “capture alive” some communication phenomena.

Implicit in this view is the assumption that interaction is indeed structured and orderly; that we have routine, normal, ordinary, regular ways of interacting that can be located and inspected in any piece of talk one might examine. As Sacks (1984) points out, we may choose to “take it that there is order at all points” (p. 22). This is a claim that can be tested quite simply by inspecting interaction. The opportunity to do this is made available by video- and audiotape recorders. A theoretical explanation may be added to the empirical claim, however, for we can describe interaction as posing specific structural problems for interactants to which there are routine, structured solutions. This is exemplified by the routine ways we have of ending conversations (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). At the possible end of any given turn at talk, it is normally relevant for a next speaker to start a turn. Ending a conversation involves suspending the relevance of next speaker’s turn upon the completion of prior speaker’s. Interactants therefore face the specifiable problem of suspending the relevance of next speaker’s turn when prior speaker’s turn is possibly complete. Examination of the endings of conversations reveals that communicators deploy routine solutions to this problem. These solutions have been observed and described (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Thus we can propose that some phenomena of interaction may consist of routine structures for the accomplishment of various activities in conversation, in the format of regular solutions to recurrent, structural problems. (It is important to note that communicators are not limited to these solutions, but exceptions to these solutions usually show orientation to the “routine” way of doing things, as is illustrated in the instance discussed below.)

The proposal that features of conversation may be treated as communication phenomena needs further refinement. Communication does not consist simply of the structural features of the architecture of interaction; it is also made up of the activities for which those structural features may be the vehicles. The availability to the researcher of both the structures of interaction and the activities carried out by way of these structures is illustrated in Beach’s treatment of the fragment of conversation he presents. Further discussion of his treatment of these different phenomena of interaction suggests that they present us with different “orders” of phenomenon. In the following pages these two different “orders” of phenomenon are explained, and their implications for finding and explicating communication phenomena are explored.

TWO “ORDERS” OF COMMUNICATION PHENOMENON

In his account of “working through a transcribed segment,” Beach offers a sketch of how a conversation analyst might begin to examine the details of a recording. He shows first that a transcription of many of the details of the talk may be made. While the transcription is not sufficient for analysis without the tape-recorded details of talk, it provides analysts with a thorough “guide” to the interaction. Next, preliminary observations are made. Note that in this catalog of observations, Beach picks up and lists “noticeables.” Many of these are instances of structural phenomena described in prior research (e.g., details of turn-taking, such as the placement of turns, gaps, overlaps, and the like, as described by Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Beach notes that CA may involve coding operations. This is instantiated in observations of this kind. These comments have a “there’s one of those” flavor—as when a nature guide points out in the wild some
life-form previously described on the pages of a book. Other observations are attempts to describe what it is that coparticipants are "doing" through the way in which their talk is produced (e.g., showing themselves to be judge or defendant, complaining, or closing something down).

These two different "orders" of observation suggest two different ways of discovering communication phenomena and, indeed, two different kinds of communication phenomenon. One mode of discovery of communication phenomena is to find in a particular piece of interaction an object that has been described in previous research. This suggests the existence of "generic" phenomena of interaction that may be found in any (or possibly every?) piece of conversation. In this way, a tape-recorded segment of interaction becomes a kind of mine from which "further instances" of a particular phenomenon may be excavated.

In contrast, one may approach a piece of talk with the questions, What is being done here? and How is it being done? That is, the activity or activities carried out in the talk may be what the researcher attempts to uncover. So initially a researcher may go for the structural features of a piece of talk (one order of phenomenon), or, alternatively or simultaneously, for the activity being carried out in and through those features of the talk (another order of phenomenon).

The second approach to some extent relies on the first, for in saying what is getting done, and how, we may frequently find that the structures described in prior research provide the vehicles for the activity in question. However, presumably all of the generic features of conversation have not yet been uncovered.

The above discussion outlines the two "orders" of communication phenomenon available for inspection in conversation. First, there are generic features of interaction; the routine, structured solutions to generic structural problems of talking together. These may be referred to as practices of conversation (Schegloff, 1983). Descriptions of some of these practices are available in existing research. For instance, turn-taking has been described by Sacks et al. (1974). Connected, interdependent sequences of turns have been described by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and by Schegloff (1972, 1984); repair organization, the structure through which troubles in talk may be resolved, has been described by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977).

Second, these features, and others, may be "deployed" in such ways as to accomplish particular activities. Practices in conversation may include the activities carried out by way of practices of conversation, or in other ways. These include such actions as complimenting (Pomerantz, 1978b), blaming (Pomerantz, 1978a), inviting (Drew, 1984), and teasing (Drew, 1987). Thus practices of conversation constitute the architectural features of talk in interaction, while practices in conversation are the rich human dramas acted out in and through these and other structures of talk in interaction.

Beach discusses orienting to the phenomenon. If our goal is to find communication phenomena to which participants, as well as researchers, are oriented—that is, those that are not simply created by the research process—we must examine what it is about the kinds of phenomena described above that enables us to see them as objects to which participants, rather than simply researchers, orient. This is best considered by examining particular examples. I begin by taking up some of the observations Beach makes about the data fragment he presents. I point out two possible approaches to beginning to examine a piece of conversation for communication phenomena, starting with observations about practices of conversation, or, alternatively, with practices in conversation. I suggest the consequences of these different approaches, and begin to show how initial observations may be developed in beginning to provide a thorough account of a communication phenomenon, oriented to by participants, demonstrably occurring in conversation, and formulated as "solutions" to routine interactional "problems."

**HOW MIGHT WE BEGIN TO IDENTIFY A COMMUNICATION PHENOMENON?**

Distinguishing between practices of conversation and practices in conversation enables us also to distinguish between two different approaches to data. For instance, one may start by observing the occurrence of particular practices of conversation, and then build an account of what is getting done through them—what they are vehicles for. Alternatively, starting with practices in conversation, one may begin by observing that an activity of a certain kind is being accomplished in the talk under consideration—that is, noting what is getting done—and proceed by describing how various features of conversation are deployed to accomplish that activity. Both of these approaches are available in Beach's treatment of the fragment of courtroom interaction. I consider his treatment of each in turn, and suggest how they may be extended to include recipients' orientations. In addition, I show how describing these practices as solutions to interactional problems enables us to formulate them as communication phenomena.

**Practices of Conversation**

As discussed above, the activity of interaction presents participants with specifiable "problems" to which they may have routine solutions. These solutions include such matters as how a conversation is to be begun (Schegloff, 1968) or ended (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973); who should talk next, and when—the problem of turn-taking (Sacks et al., 1974); how series of turns may be shown to hang together—the organization of talk into sequences (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973); and how troubles or disturbances in talking may be resolved—the organization of conversational repair (Schegloff et al., 1977). Since these are fundamental problems that participants must resolve for interaction to take place, their occurrence is likely to be observable at some point in most conversations. Therefore one way to "cut into" the data is to note some feature of one of these practices of conversation,
and then proceed by explicating the problem for which it may be a solution (Schegloff, 1967b). For instance, one could note the occurrence of overlap in line 124 of the interaction described by Beach (p. 225).

Simply noting the occurrence of overlap in these turns ("Sir" in line 124 overlapping with "subject" in line 123, and the overlap with the very end of "you" in line 126) achieves only a preliminary coding of this fragment of conversation for the presence of the conversational practice of overlap. However, it does provide a starting place for an account of what is going on in the conversation. The preliminary observation of the occurrence of overlap could be developed by drawing on existing findings about overlap in conversation. For instance, it has been noted that overlaps are frequently placed at points where they show their speaker's awareness of the possible end of prior speaker's turn. That is, by the placing their turns at points where prior speaker's turn is possibly almost complete, and a turn by next speaker is possibly almost relevant, overlappers maintain an orientation to the turn-taking rule that speakers speak one at a time, without gaps or overlaps. Rather than being interruptive (and hence "rude"), these overlapping turns suggest that a recipient may constantly monitor an ongoing turn for a possible point of completion, at which point the next turn might rightfully begin. In starting up in overlap, then, a possible next speaker shows an orientation to that point as a possible point of completion of the prior speaker's turn (Jefferson, in press). Jefferson shows how a turn may have "a strong sense of finality about it" (p. 3). In such a case, recipient's orientation to this "strong sense of finality" may be shown when he or she starts up, while prior speaker's turn in fact continues. In this way, both participants show a "lawful" orientation to the usual organization for turn-taking in which one party talks at a time.

Such a case of overlap is displayed in lines 122 and 123 of Beach's data fragment (p. 225). In line 122, D may be hearing J's turn as about to be completed with the words "off calendar." The stress on "off" could be heard by recipients as preterminal stress—the syllable preceding the last part of a turn is often stressed just prior to the completion of the turn. However, it is not only the turn that is possibly hearable as complete at this point. In the proposal that "further proceedings can go off calendar," recipients may also hear that the judge could be about to propose closing down the proceedings involving this case. Note that it is at precisely this point—immediately upon the completion of "calendar," the possibly hearable end of the turn, and the proposal—that D's "Sir" in line 124 of the "problem" at this point, then, to which his "Sir" may be a "solution," could be formulated as follows: Given the hearable possibility that J's turn is approaches a possible end, and that this possible end of J's turn coincides with the possible end of a proposal to close down the current proceedings, how might D begin a turn? In starting up precisely at this point, D resolves the problem by beginning a turn at a possibly hearable completion point in J's turn.

In beginning an account of the occurrence of this overlap, however, it is not enough to describe just the behavior of the overlayer. The production of overlap is a collaborative effort; it is one of those activities that cannot be done alone. For overlap to occur, J must continue at the same time that D talks. While the occurrence of D's turn is hearable to J, J's turn nonetheless continues. That is, J does not yield the floor to D. Rather, he continues talking (lines 123-124; see p. 225). Overlap provides the "overlapped" party—the one whose turn was under way when another speaker began to talk—with the options of relinquishing the overlapped turn or continuing it. In the situation presented above, since D's "Sir" and J's "subject" begin simultaneously, it is possible that, on beginning to continue his turn, J was not initially aware of D's turn. However, as can be observed throughout conversation, participants orient to each other's talk on a micro-momentary basis. It would be possible for J to relinquish his turn at any point in the progress of "subj." or thereafter. That is, he has the option of showing orientation to D's turn by responding to it in some way. This response could involve dropping out, thereby providing D with the possibility of continuing to talk. Alternatively, orientation to the overlapping turn could be shown by J responding to it by treating "Sir" as a summons, eliciting a response from him (see Schegloff, 1968, regarding the operation of summonses). However, the overlap is effectively not oriented to here. Instead, J's turn continues. In this setting, then, where the continuation of his turn is overlapped by another speaker, J's problem may be formulated in turn-taking organizational terms as, What should be done in the face of overlapping talk by a coparticipant? Available solutions to the problem include relinquishing his turn, or continuing to talk with the possibility of continued overlap.

The above account of D's overlapping of a turn by J shows that simply noting precise placement of an overlap—a practice of conversation — on the face of it does not constitute so much an analysis as an observation. In order to build a case for this overlap as a conversational phenomenon, then, a first step is to specify the "work" that the producer of the overlap could be doing by placing his turn at this particular point: In doing this, the account becomes a story of interaction, for it involves describing where the overlap is placed in relation to what is going on in the prior turn with which it overlaps. In building the account in interactional terms, D's turn is described as a solution to the problem of when and how to begin a turn. (Note that, as is mentioned in passing above, the turn could also be formulated quite differently—as a summons, as well as an overlap. This could provide for another account of it.) J's continuation in overlap with D's turn, and after it is complete, may then be described as his solution to the problem of simultaneous talk—to hold onto his turn.

The account provided above relies on the assumption that the placement of recipient's turn is orderly, and not random; that D's "Sir" is not placed immediately after the possibly hearable end of J's turn simply by chance. Rather, it suggests a precise organization of interaction, in which coparticipants show orientation to each other's ongoing behavior. By including coparticipants' orientations in this way, interactants' orientation to (and creation of) the orderliness of communication phenomena is demonstrated and explicated.
Through an insistence on the interactional production of conversational practices (such as overlap), where co-participants show specific and strong orientation to precisely detail each other’s behavior, an account may begin to be built of where overlaps occur. As Jefferson (in press) has shown, the account can be built so as to provide a description of the orderliness of the organization of overlap in conversation, so that it may be regarded as an orderly phenomenon, produced precisely (and sometimes even strategically) by participants. This contrasts with the view of it as a violation of ordinary turn-taking—a kind of rude conversational aberration. This brief description of one occurrence of overlap in conversation suggests that by positing conversational behavior as a solution to a conversational problem—where to place a turn in the course of an ongoing stream of talk by another, for D, and how to hold on to a turn and bring it to completion, for J—we may begin to build an account of a miniature piece of conversational activity as a communication phenomenon, one that accomplishes specifiable actions and is governed by describable structural features of talking.

Starting an analysis by choosing a recognizable practice of conversation, already described in published research, may be contrasted with beginning with an observation about what is going on in the fragment in question—that is, describing the practices in conversation. This contrast is illustrated in the account below of what may be getting done in the fragment just discussed.

Practices in Conversation

Beach’s commentary on the data fragment points out two different ways in which particular activities are achieved through the way in which conversation is used. First, he suggests that participants are “doing” a courtroom hearing, and shoves up that claim by noting some features of the conversation at hand (p. 229). Next he claims that the activity under way at the beginning of the transcription he presents is the “closing down” of the “official” business of the motion (p. 228). He treats both of these as activities achieved through particular kinds of conversational practice. Both are treated as practices in conversation by basing preliminary evidence for claims about them in some features of the recorded talk. I briefly discuss how each of these candidate phenomena is described by Beach, and suggest ways of extending his analysis in beginning to develop an account of a phenomenon. My discussion shows how describing the activity as providing solutions to interactional problems enables us to begin to build an account of a conversational phenomenon as a recognizable phenomenon for communication studies. In discussing both “type 1” practices in conversation and “type 2” practices in conversation, I indicate the importance of locating the candidate phenomenon in interactional context.

Type 1 practices in conversation. In the first approach he takes to practices in conversation, Beach supports his claim that the data at hand are from a court proceeding by noting that participants address each other in particular ways. He cites the address terms “Sir,” “Your honor,” “marshall,” “defendant,” and “plain-
tiff” to warrant this claim (p. 227). Beach notes that these observations are the product of “a preliminary inspection.” There are various ways in which they may be extended.

First, clearly not all of these address terms are peculiar to court hearings. Therefore, one might want to go on and specify what it is about these terms that makes them understandable to participants here as peculiar to the courtroom. Also, if these features of the talk are to count as warranting the characterization of the setting as “courtroom interaction,” what is it about these address terms that specifically invokes that characterization for participants could be spelled out. Putting the problem in this way suggests the importance of including in an account both how items in talk are treated by participants and where they are placed with respect to ongoing talk. That is, an account of the location in conversation and treatment of the address terms may help to show how they are used by interlocutors as part of the constitution of the scene as a courtroom. By locating the terms in the interaction in this way, that participants are “doing a courtroom hearing” is shown to be the case for them.

Often we are led to characterize a conversation on the basis of the environment in which it occurs—“medical” interaction, “classroom” interaction, “interview” interaction, and so on. Of course, however, it is possible for people in the physical setting of a hospital or school or job interview to engage in nonmedical, nonclassroom, or noninterview interaction. Similarly, it is possible for a casual conversational exchange to “feel like” a medical, classroom, or interview interaction (Schegloff, 1987a). This suggests that it is not just the setting but also the behavior that occurs in that setting that constitutes it as one or the other. While on the other hand it therefore becomes important to warrant claims about the character of the interaction in observable features of that interaction, it is also important to be wary of co-opting features of conversation as warrants for a priori claims about what makes (for example) a court hearing into a court hearing (Schegloff, 1987a).

For there is a certain amount of circularity involved in attending to a piece of conversational interaction that took place in a courtroom as “courtroom” interaction—if we “know” that to be the case, we may be led to treat any possibly relevant features of the interaction in the setting as providing evidence for what we already “know.” We may be tempted to treat the setting as constituting the action, rather than vice versa, and simply look to the interaction to confirm the belief that the setting creates action of a particular kind. That is, we may tend to treat action found in that setting as “courtroom interaction” simply because it is found to take place in a courtroom. This involves the researcher in a kind of coding operation in which features of the interaction are judged for the extent to which they can be assimilated to the canon of “courtroom interaction.” In other words, data are approached with a particular “category” that is to be filled out and exemplified with details from the talk.

Despite these possible problems, noting such features of talk as the address terms that are used is a valuable starting point for building an account of how participants “produce” the courtroom setting. However, the above discussion
suggests that we should also examine the way in which the noted features occur—that is, their interactional environment, the local details of the talk, and the ways in which they provide a particular solution to a specifiable problem.

The rather global category of “courtroom interaction,” formulated as a practice in conversation—that is, an activity achieved through the way in which interaction is done—may be contrasted with local episodes of activity, such as “closing down official business,” which are also achieved through the way in which specifiable features of conversation are deployed. As the following discussion indicates, however, in dealing with this somewhat different order of detail, similar concerns must be taken into account. An account of the conversational details of the candidate phenomenon, “closing down the official business of the motion,” also involves locating the activity in its sequential environment.

**Type 2 practices in conversation.** Where Beach notes that J “appears to initiate closing of the ‘official’ business of the motion (i.e., the claim of exemption)” in lines 121-123” and offers observations in support of this claim, he takes a second approach to practices in conversation. Here he makes claims about the activity being achieved through various particulars of the fragment of talk discussed above (p. 228). Beach notes features of recipients’ turns in lines 124 and 127-130 that suggest their orientation to J’s turn as “closing down.” For instance, he notes the overlap in line 124 (discussed above) as showing D’s orientation to J’s having (possibly) reached a place where speaker transition may be relevant (p. 228). He also notes that overlap in line 127. He claims that “PL’s overlapped utterance does exhibit an immediate response to J’s query, yet it also displays his recognition that J is, for all practical purposes, nearing completion of closing down the motion.” This orientation is displayed, Beach suggests, in PL’s asking a question about “additional business yet to be taken care of” in lines 127-131. While these observations provide some evidence for an orientation on the part of recipients to the possible end of J’s turn, and the possible relevance of their taking a turn, more evidence is needed to support the claim that J is hearably bringing to a close the motion at hand. Viewing the occurrence in this way highlights the importance of placing the turns in question in their sequential environment.

The process of explicating the sequential environment of the occurrence is begun by Beach in his description of how recipients’ turns may show some orientation to the possible “closing.” This account can be filled out by discussing what it is recipients might be orienting to. That is, the researcher may pose the question, What is it that makes J’s turn orientable to as possibly initiating a closing down of this case? As the following discussion suggests, in order to show how J’s turn may be heard as possibly closing down the motion, it is necessary to build an account of the conversational environment of the activity—that is, the turns that precede it, as well as those that follow it—making it hearable as performing the activity of “closing down.” Once this has been achieved, the question of the structural problem to which J’s turn is a solution may be raised, and the activity of “closing a motion” may be formulated as an orientable to practice in conversation.

First, in locating J’s utterance in lines 121-126, it is necessary to examine the talk that immediately precedes it. The beginning of J’s turn in line 121, “So,” indicates that this turn is to be taken as “consequent” to something prior to it. Examining the preceding few lines enables the researcher to see what lines 121-126 are part of for participants. Just before the additional lines presented, discussion about D’s payment of installments is under way. Note that J’s turn in line 121 is specifically built as subsequent to a question and answer that precede it (in lines not included in Beach’s discussion).

Briefly, note that in line 165 J directs a question to D. D answers the question in line 168. This response appears to resolve the issue of the installment. (Much more could be said about how each of these actions is achieved.) Given the apparent resolution of the issue of the installment, it could be hearable that the matters of the case are complete, and discussion of it may relevantly be suspended. J’s “problem” at this point, then, is how to suspend discussion of the case. The solution to this problem begins to be displayed (thereby displaying the “problem” itself) in J’s turn in lines 121-122, where, with “So,” he first displays what that he is about to say is to be taken as consequent to the prior exchange, and then begins to propose that “further proceedings can go off calendar.” As was described above with respect to the overlap in line 123, D apparently makes a bid for a turn. As Beach notes, this may suggest D’s orientation to the possibility that J may be initiating the closing down of the proceedings, making this a relevant place for “any other business” (p. 228). Recipient’s problem here, then, is how to get the floor for the consideration of “any other business.” To close down any kind of interactional event, the cooperation of all parties to the event is needed (Scheffö & Sacks, 1973), for an interaction is not “closed” if one party to it continues to take turns. In disattending D’s turn here, J may provide for the continued possibility of closing down the proceeding, rather than taking up whatever D may be about to initiate.

In specifically addressing his turn in lines 125-126 to PL, however, J provides for PL to be incorporated into the proceedings at this point (see lines 125-131, p. 225-226). This brief account suggests that, in the face of the recognizable activity of possible closing down—the proposal that the case go “off calendar” immediately after a key problem, the payment of installments, has been resolved—the “problems” of the other parties to the case, D and PL, include how to resolve any other case-relevant issues that may be pending for them.

The above account of both type 1 and type 2 practices in conversation poses candidate phenomena as solutions to problems. This format for examining phenomena of conversation places the objects under consideration firmly in interaction. In each case, the question of the sequential location of the objects is used to fill out an account of the possible phenomenon. In this way the phenomena of conversation are shown to be intrinsically interactive in character, both in their construction and in the activity they come to perform.
CONCLUSIONS

The above account of possible approaches to communication phenomena in conversation suggests that they may be viewed as practices of conversation and practices in conversation. From the starting point of noticing a practice of conversation, it is possible to come up with an account of what that instance of conversational practice is being used to do in that particular environment. This is done by drawing on the particulars of the conversational environment in which the object occurs. In providing the account presented above, I simply chose an object about which I felt I might have something to say. The object I chose was a feature of conversational practice that has been described by Jefferson (in press). I applied her explanation of the phenomenon of overlap in attempting to provide an account of this particular instance of overlap. My starting point, then, was simply to "cut into" the data, using preexisting research as a tool. A possible problem with this approach is that, in simply "picking features off the transcript," the researcher runs the risk of "missing the action." That is, by starting with a feature that is initially simply of note to the researcher, we may disattent what is of prime concern to the communicators—the activities conveyed by way of the interaction. In this way, this approach faces a danger similar to that of coding operations: We may end up throwing the baby out with the bathwater, missing the real action.

In contrast, starting with practices in conversation involved noting some activity that was being achieved in the talk in question. Details of the talk were then taken to provide support for the claim being made about the activity in question. It was noted that it may be possible to avoid imposing researchers' categories on data if the sequential location of the talk under examination is described in building a case for the problems to which the phenomenon in question is a solution. This emphasizes for communication researchers the importance of noting the ways in which communicators "work up" or "work through" communication phenomena, creating them interactively in the course of ongoing conversation. It stresses a focus on participants' orientations, as they are displayed in and through their talk. It is in this way that the close analysis of the details of ordinary conversation may provide us with access to naturally occurring, oriented-to-communication phenomena.

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