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## TALKING CAREERS, CAREER TALK

Conversations, such as those that make interviews, generally are analyzed in terms of the content of the talk. This talk tends to be attributed turn by turn to individual speakers, as if what one person said was independent from what another person said, somehow a reflection of what is in the mind of a person. Such an approach, however, does not allow us to understand how a conversation unfolds; it does not allow us to understand the conversation as a dynamic event in and off itself. Moreover, a synchronic approach, which takes the entire transcript as if it had been produced as one piece does not allow us to understand the constitution of the content. This content emerged from the interactions that also produced the interview as a situation, as the participants provide each other with the resources required for knowing if you are on track in a process that in many cases none of the participants knows beforehand what it will eventually look like after the fact. In this chapter, I provide evidence for the interactional constitution of an interview – both as process and as a product – leading to an irreducible nature of the resultant text. This irreducibility is at work with respect to the participants (we cannot pick out individual lines and attribute it to an individual) and with respect to time (we cannot assume that participants at some point already know what they will be talking about only minutes hence so that the knowledge at the two instances is very different).

### KNOWING A LANGUAGE IS KNOWING YOUR WAY AROUND THE WORLD

Classical perspectives on language assume that to engage in conversations means for individuals to produce utterances that are instantiations of the grammar that the speaker has learned before. The grammar provides patterns – subject (noun), predicate (verb), object (noun), and so on – and slots into which appropriate words are plugged. But thinking in this way does not advance us a bit, as children can speak in correct sentences without knowing any bit of formal grammar. Many adults, in fact, do not know formal grammar and yet produce grammatically correct sentences. Moreover, culturally competent individuals speak appropriately, always adapted to the current context; and when contexts change, they change the ways in which they talk. There is therefore no difference between knowing a language and knowing your way around the world; in fact, it is in and with language that we make the social world and society. This situation also means that we need to look at language differently. In this respect, pragmatist philosophers tell us that

there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply

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to cases. . . . we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions. (Davidson, 1986, p. 446)

We do need a different approach to the analysis of interview data, as the traditional approach does not explain how two individuals interact, especially if at least one of them has never talked about a particular topic. Even more interestingly, people not only make conversations in talking, they also make the kind of situation they find themselves in even if they have never been part of such a situation before. For example, only occasionally do students participate in interviews generally, and even more rare are iterations of particular types of interviews about specific topics. What they are to do is itself emergent from the situation to which they contribute to bring it about. The ultimate question, therefore, will be to understand how two individuals pull off an interview given that they have not had done this together before.

The position I take in this chapter is that interaction participants do not find themselves in an interview as if it were a box, with a precise scenario for what to do and say that they implement in a mechanical way. Especially because neither participant can know beforehand what they will say a little down the road, and even less what the other will say or how she will respond, the interview as process (event) and the interview content *emerges* from the interaction. The interview therefore is a contingent event, and the concept of emergence means that the process and content cannot be predicted. In fact, we do not need an interview if the outcome could be predicted. We only would need to invent a brain or spinal tap, some device that would allow the contents of a person's mind to ooze out in the form of sound or writing. But such a device does not exist. I show below that participants in the interview do a lot of interactive work to make interview as process and the content of the interview. There are resources that they make available to each other to succeed; and the participants help each other in their mutual roles to bring the interview off and produce something that they recognize as the result of an interview. Therefore, neither process nor content can be predicted on the basis of what we might think to know about the individual participants before their actual meeting. In fact, if we could predict what will happen and what they will say, they would not have to convene, but we could somehow compute the content.

At the same time, participants to an interview will not produce just any kind of situation. What they do is recognizable as an interview, even though the specifics cannot be predicted. Moreover, what they say in terms of content is recognizable as contribution to an interview about possible futures and careers. There is therefore a dialectic at work between the cultural possibilities (including language) available and the way in which specific possibilities are concretized. A lot of the interaction therefore requires coordination work, and participants make this coordination work itself available to one another. But an interview does not have to remain an interview: it may turn into something else. One study showed, for example, how what started out as a think-aloud/interview situation turned into a series of queries for help and eventually into a tutoring session even though the interviewee was a 30-plus year physics professor and the interviewer a third-year undergraduate student in physics and the topic where graphs from biology and physics (Roth & Middle-

ton, 2006). Because I was thinking about interviews in terms of emergence, which allows the event to transform itself and turn into something different, I was able to note the very different trajectories that planned events may take.

Participating in an interview, therefore, means participating in a creative endeavor. One part of the outcome is the interview context itself; another part is the text realized, which comes to be transcribed and used as data source. The outcomes are not willy-nilly, because, as is the case for artists in other domains, there is not unlimited freedom of expression if the artist is producing for another, who is to understand and appreciate. The participants in an interview about possible future selves and future careers are oriented toward the intelligibility of what they say, both with respect to one another as to the intelligibility of the ultimate text that emerges, which, in the present case, would be an account of the possible future selves and future careers that high school biology students envision.

One way of understanding language and life is to think of language as a game in the way Ludwig Wittgenstein has done, which comes with a sense that players develop for the different kinds of moves that it allows, much in the way as described by Pierre Bourdieu. But just as in any game, what actually happens on the field cannot be predicted, though any situation can be assessed after the fact in terms of this or that explicit rule. Knowing the rules, however, does not mean the same as being a good player. Many a sports journalist has never reached any proficiency in the games that the comment. What is required on the field is a *sense of the game*, a sense of what to do next. Playing hockey, soccer, tennis, or football means dealing with the unpredictable, making the best plays in the situation at hand, which itself cannot be predicted. Much like a jazz improvisation or a jam session, knowing how to play and participate goes far beyond knowing any rule, and, in fact, it does not take knowing rules to be good at a game. We know this to be, because, as I note above, children and many adults are highly proficient speakers even when they know no formal grammatical rules at all. The sense of the game therefore is a concept appropriate for an approach in which knowing a language and knowing one's way around the world are indistinguishable.

#### MAKING THE INTERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to show that interviews are not means to make content flow from the mind of the interviewee, as if there were to be prefigured content that the interviewer helps to be express like pushing the sides of a toothpaste tube to make the contents ooze out. Interviewer and interviewee not only collude to produce the interview text, part of which subsequently tends to be ascribed to the interviewee as an individual characteristic, but also work together to produce the interview as context. That is, both (interview) text and context are produced together and even require the collaboration to produce anything recognizable as, here, an interview concerning career, possible selves, identity, or ability in science. That is, the content of any one interview cannot be ascribed to any individual participant or combination thereof. Interviews – about how someone developed interest in marine biology as a career or what her possible futures are – presuppose intersubjectivity and intelligibility, and therefore presuppose both the forms and



Figure 2.1. In the interview setting, the interviewer (left) and interviewee sit in plain view of each other.

contents that the unfolding narratives *can* take. Here I focus on how the participants pull off producing the interview as event and how they pull off producing specific content of interest to those who will analyze the interview. I use one interview episode as example to exhibit a number of different features.

#### *The Interactional Work of Producing a Question*



Interviews are often thought in terms of the information processing metaphor. The interviewer asks a question, which solicits recall on the part of the interviewee, who, after finding the appropriate information for the response somewhere in long-term memory, produces it in short-term memory and then spills it out by means of language. Close analyses of videotapes and audiotapes of face-to-face or telephone interviews shows that answers are coproduced so that what is being said in response to a question cannot be ascribed to the interviewee alone. In the present context, we actually have evidence that the same is the case for the interview question. The interviewee “helps” to get the appropriate words that complete the question in a proper way and thereby makes the latter part of the record.

In this episode, we join Pei-Ling and Jennifer about 28 minutes into the interview (Figure 2.1). They already have gone through the process of getting started, explaining the purpose of this session, and produced the map by fixing the Post-It notes. The entire episode is actually framed as such by the interviewer, who introduces a topic (turn 01) and, in following up with another topic (turn 28), concludes the topic. In fact, it is not just Pei-Ling (the interviewer) who begins, but the beginning and ending of the episode are achieved together. In the turns from 01 to 05, the two interaction participants achieve an offer/acceptance pair, with some conversational repair concerning the word “experience.” In the interaction, each produces not only content, which researchers often attribute to the inside, the subjec-

tivity of the person producing the locution, but they also produce the context. The interviewer (Pei-Ling) not only asks the interviewee (Jennifer) to reveal certain contents of her thinking, but also she *asks a question*, or rather, she offers the first part of a question–response pair. In *asking* a question, the interviewer produces context, because she could have done something else, in which case we might have recognized the event as belonging to some other category, for example, a tutoring session. In one of our research projects, this is precisely what happened when interviewees, asked to provide their expertise advice concerning graphs began to ask the interviewer whether they were right. As a result, and again as a collaborative achievement, the interview turned into a tutoring session, where an undergraduate physics and anthropology major tutored one of his physics professors on how to read graphs, including in the field of physics.

**Fragment 1a**

→01 P: so before the bamfield experi (0.25) ment you (0.39)  
 <<grimaces>no> [experience]  
 →02 J: <<smiling>[experience]> [heha  
 ] ((P smiles))  
 →03 (0.24)  
 →04 P: [ya] (0.15) ye (0.13) you di=nt want to be] a::=  
 ] ((J continues to smile))  
 ]  
 05 J: =i kind of did like i that was jst like (0.40) i thought  
 it=d be really cool (0.22) ((J looks at P, P nods, who  
 continues for a while but stops as J has gaze directed  
 into the room)) a::nd i=d been thinking about it and i  
 was like ↑wELL maybe it will work; maybe it wo:nt, ye  
 know;  
 06 [(0.34) ]  
 ] ((J's hands wave back and forth))  
 07 P: uh [um]  
 ] ((nods))  
 08 J: [st] kinda see where] it [goes  
 ] ((P nods))  
 <<p>and then I went to my parents and i was just like>] i  
 ↑wanna be a marine biolo[gist so]  
 09 P: [u::m:: ]  
 10 (0.80)  
 11 J: ya that was really cool  
 12 (0.22)

The opening shows how the two are aligned. At the end of the sounding out of “experiment,” the interviewer is position as in Figure 2.2a. The video offprint shows how the interviewee squarely gazes at her. What we can hear as the difficult



Figure 2.2. The interviewer and interviewee use orientation, body movements, and prosody as resources for producing the context in talking (texting) so that the difference between text and context becomes undecidable.

production of the word “experiment,” including the pause in the middle of the word, occurs in plain sight of the intended recipient. There is then a marker of something gone wrong, “no” (turn 01), followed by another word beginning with the syllables, “experi” but completely differently, “ence.” . . . Pei-Ling utters “ya” (turn 04), which can be heard as completing an offer (the word “experience”)–acceptance (“ya”) pair.

At the same time, we see the interviewer bring up her hand and produce the shape of a hand attempting to grasp something (Figure 2.2b); the arm is slightly lowered forward together with the upper body and head, as if there were some problem in bringing forth what is to be articulated (Figure 2.2c). Jennifer breaks a smile and continues doing so while the interviewer, too, breaks out into a smile (Figure 2.2d). There is a brief pause (turn 03), and Pei-Ling then utters an elaboration, “ya, ye, you didn’t want to be a . . .” The utterance remains grammatically incomplete, as, following the drawn out sound of an “a” Jennifer already begins what we can recognize as the second part of a question–response pair.

We may gloss what we see here as an event in which the interviewee assists in the production of the appropriate question, as she produces the correct term to be used simultaneously with the interviewer, who, in uttering, has produced a self-correction. First, in producing the same word as Pei-Ling, Jennifer exhibits something that we have come to know as *participative thinking* (Bakhtin, 1993): Without being aligned with her interlocutor, Jennifer could not have produced the appropriate word, here acknowledged by Pei-Ling as the right one (“ya”). In fact, participative thinking allows the anticipation required so that two speakers may articulate the “same” issues even using the same words, such as when Jennifer and Pei-Ling utter the sound-word as part of a repair of what the latter had previously said.

We can see what happened as an offer–acceptance pair. The interviewee offers the word that better and more correctly fits a question in the present content. The interviewer accepts the offer (“ya, ye” [turn 04]) and uses the corrected situation as the background for completing the question, which they realize to have been about becoming a marine biologist. That is, as the events unfold, the two achieve the question to have been about whether Jennifer (interviewee) had or had not the desire to be a marine biologist prior to what they refer to as “the Bamfield experience.” In turn 08, Jennifer articulates that it was after this experience that she had gone to her parents to tell them that she wanted to become a marine biologist. (On how they arrive at this answer, see next section.) That is, we can see Jennifer assisting the interviewer to get her question; and it turns out here that the interviewer produces the correct word to complete the question at the same time as the offer coming from the interviewee.

We can see the turns of grinning and laughing that the two produce as signs that each has recognized the situation for what it is: The interviewer has had some difficulties producing the question. Pei-Ling expresses this difficulty in the body movement associated with the verbal problem, she self-corrects/receives an offer for correction, and accepts the correction. Both mark this interaction sequence by grinning and laughing, each having available the preceding expression, so that the changes therein can be seen with respect to what has happened at the instant.

In a way, the situation might be glossed as an embarrassing one, where an interviewer has difficulties doing what she is supposed to do. But the mutual grins and smiles allow a situational understanding of benevolence, on the part of the participant, and an institutional order in which the researcher is not – as often portrayed in the literature on qualitative methods – in a power over situation. In this situation, it is not the interviewer with an upper hand over the interviewee. If anything at all, it is the interviewee with the upper hand, she provides the correction, and she provides an accepting facial expression – as if not getting the right word out is something that may happen to any one.

*The Interactional Work of Producing an Answer*

In the previous section, we see how, contrary to what might be expected, the interviewee is an integral part in the production of what after the fact we will understand to have functioned as a question–response pair. As a very first move, we may demarcate heuristically what will have been the answer. The next question will be asked in turn 13, so whatever appears between the end of the question in turn 04 to turn 13 is part of the response. We can easily see in the transcript that there are turns and pauses that make up the response in real time. We now move back into the moment-to-moment analysis conducted in a first-time-through manner.

First, we note that Jennifer begins to speak before Pei-Ling has grammatically completed the question. To make the utterance grammatically completed, the name of a profession, for example, would be required to produce the question “You did not want to be a «name of professional»?” such as in “You didn’t want to be a marine biologist?” But Pei-Ling does not insist completing the question and so the turn falls to Jennifer. This is not a requirement for conversations, as we know that speakers sometimes continue to speak at the same time before one or the other cedes the turn. Here, as Pei-Ling no longer continues, the turn falls to Jennifer. That is, the precise beginning of the turn arose when Jennifer, in speaking, indicates the intent to do the next turn, and Pei-Ling, in becoming silent, accepting that this turn now belongs to Jennifer.

Jennifer then begins to talk. But her gaze is not at Pei-Ling, who, in turn, is gazing at her with apparent intent (Figure 2.3). Pei-Ling nods, but initially, Jennifer cannot see. Pei-Ling continues to nod until Jennifer turns and directs her gaze. Pei-Ling then produces an “uh hm,” upon which Jennifer directs her gaze squarely to Pei-Ling’s face. In nodding and producing the interjection the dictionary sense of which is a spoken affirmative or non-committal response (“uh hm”), Pei-Ling signals attention, acceptance of the utterance as response, and also that she is not currently vying for a next turn at talk. In fact, the first of the two interactions comes after a pause, which provides opportunities to each speaker to signal intention to take the next turn at talk. The interjection might be such a signal, but here, Jennifer overlaps in producing another description of undecided state in which she was at the time about becoming a marine biologist. Her gaze returns to Pei-Ling’s face. The latter nods, and thereby provides Jennifer with the signal that she may continue to talk. Again, Pei-Ling uses an interjection that positively acknowledges the utterance, this time overlapping with Jennifer. There is then a longer pause. This





*Figure 2.3. Jennifer, right, directs her gazes away from Pei-Ling, who gazes at her.*

again provides the possibility for any one speaker to take the next turn, which is Jennifer, who provides an evaluation of the event just described. There is another brief pause, which, as Pei-Ling asks another question, signals change over and turn in the role of speakers.

The end of the turn at talk and, therefore, the end of the utterance that completed the question–response pair is again achieved interactionally. In producing the interjection, Pei-Ling does provide a sign that may be heard as a signal that she will take the turn. It comes at an instant that will have been the end of Jennifer’s utterance, who, in stopping, signals the willingness to terminate the turn at talk. (I chose the formulation “what will have been the end” because at that very instant the participants do not and cannot know whether that will be the de facto end or whether the end entails some further discursive turns.) It is not surprising, therefore, to observe the longer pause. Two interlocutors have been speaking at the same time and thereby indicated willingness to speak, but, in becoming both silent, indicate that they are willing to be silent. The pause also becomes an invitation to both to speak. Eventually, it is Jennifer who produces another utterance (turn 11). It is followed by a rather brief pause, before Pei-Ling begins a next turn without being contested.

In the next turn, the interviewer utters what can be heard as a request for an elaboration, “so you think it’s a good career for you?” (turn 13). Affirmation begins even before Pei-Ling has completed, as Jennifer begins to nod and then produces a “yea” that overlaps with what comes to be the end of Pei-Ling’s turn. In this exchange, we also see how the two speakers provide each other with nonverbal resources for orienting not only to aspects of the environment, here the map on the table, but simultaneously to its content. Thus, precisely with the utterance of “it’s,” Pei-Ling points toward the lower part of the chart (Figure 2.4, left) where, at the very bottom of the map, we can find the sticker on which Jennifer has marked “marine biologist.” Jennifer turns her head and only about 0.6 seconds later has her gaze oriented toward the lower part of the chart (Figure 2.4, right).

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**Fragment 1b**

→13 P: s:O: you think [itsa] good care[er fer ] [you]?  
          [((points toward map))  
14 J:  [((nods))]<<f>[yea]>  
          ((looks at the map)) i think itll work out actually.  
          (0.25) i=m really excited to see if it comes through  
          ((nods))  
→15 P: <<nodding>you think itsa good career [for you]>  
16 J:  <<f, nodding>[yea: i ]>i think  
17      (0.18)  
18 P: uh um

Jennifer elaborates the affirmative, “I think it’ll work out actually,” and, after a brief pause, adds, “I’m really excited to see if it comes through” (turn 14). Now we might be tempted to see this as a response but, with the next turn, come to evaluate



Figure 2.4. Interactions are observed at the nonverbal level, as the interviewee directs her gaze in the direction that the interviewer’s deictic gesture pointed only 0.6 seconds before.

it differently. The interviewer utters “the same” question again, “You think it’s a good career for you?” (turn 15). That is, Pei-Ling does not just ask the same question in another form but in fact utters what we transcribe to be exactly the same words. But precisely because these are the same words, they are no longer the same because now they are spoken against a background that includes the previous utterance of these words. Why might these words individually and combined into the utterance as a whole differ from the previous instantiation? Well, for starters, we hear the words individually and taken together as an uttered question as a whole *again*. That is, in turn 13, we hear the question; and in turn 15, we hear it *again*. Why would we have to hear the question *again*, why do we hear it *again*? This question makes no sense after the first instantiation, but now, as we look at a repetition of the utterance, what it asks is more than what it asked initially.

First, if the current question has not been answered – be it because the respondent has not heard the question, be it because the respondent has not understood or understood in a different way – then a reiteration provides another oppor-

tunity for producing the information being sought. Second, any utterance includes its nature as the social evaluation of the preceding utterance to which it constitutes the second part. In being the same question *again*, the interviewer also communicates that the preceding turn is not an answer (or not an appropriate answer) to the question initially posed. In uttering the question again in precisely the same manner, the interviewer marks the preceding answer as insufficient or incomplete. But, in asking again, she also offers an opportunity for an elaboration or correction.

Again, even before the question is complete, Jennifer begins with an affirmation, then states to be thinking, before a pause develops (turn 17). Pei-Ling ends this pause with an interjection before Jennifer begins what will turn into a longer turn at talk (turn 19). Jennifer then launches into what becomes a statement about the number of jobs available, and about having to move to Vancouver to work at the aquarium. It, whatever Jennifer may denote by this indexical (the career of a marine biologist, perhaps), gives her many travel options that she is excited about.

**Fragment 1c**

- 19 J: =i mean (.) there arent, (0.27) thAT many (.) <<p>jobs  
available but i mean> (0.26) i could always move over to  
vancouver; ((looks at map)) <<dim>a::n:d (.) work the  
aquarium there; or in> (.) it gives me a lot of travel-  
ling options which i=m really excited about,  
20 (0.28)
- 21 P: uh [um:: ] ((nods, J's gaze toward map))
- 22 J: [becau]se (0.20) i really like (.) t travel  
23 (0.20)
- 24 P: uh u[m] ((nods, J's gaze toward map))
- 25 J: [a]::nd; so::; (0.43) <<dim>i think that would de::;>  
(0.48) it it really incorporates a lot of my interESTs  
((looks at P))
- 26 P: ((nods)) uh hm
- 27 J: ((looks back at map, P keeps on nodding, till J looks  
back at her)) a::nd i love being in the lab; and i love  
analyzing things; and dissecting an (0.43) ah look into a  
microscope <<p>and stuff like that> ((looks at P))
- 28 P: ((nods)) and whats your meaning of tRAvel;

There is a pause, interrupted by the interviewer's interjection that marks acceptance in the same way as the nodding, which invite continuation. This continuation comes about as the interjection ends with the beginning of an explanation for the preceding statement, "because I really like to travel" (turn 22). There is a pause, another interjection and nod, and produces what we can hear as a response to the question about marine biology being a good career: "it really incorporates a lot of my interests" (turn 25). The interviewer produces another accepting interjection, which leads into a further elaboration of the affirmation, "I love being in the lab, and I love analyzing things, and dissecting, looking into a microscope and stuff like

that?" (turn 27). Jennifer ends with directing her gaze to Pei-Ling, who nods, then asks her counterpart about her meaning of travel (turn 28).

In asking about travel, the interviewer changes the topic from marine biology and it being a good career option to traveling. In this, the interviewer does not merely change and ask a next question but also provide an evaluation of the previous utterance, which is accepted as sufficient – there is no further request for elaboration. That is, in this brief exchange we see this machinery at work, whereby asking a question concerning the same topic achieves topical cohesion *and* indicates that there is still interest in and need for talking further about the present topic. In asking the same question again, the interviewer not only makes another attempt in soliciting some information but also indicates that what has been offered before is not sufficient.

This, therefore, allows us to think about interactions in a new way. Rather than having as basic unit the turn pair, it is actually a triplet of turns that constitutes a basic unit. Thus, for example, turn 15 is both the first part of the sequence turn 15–16/19, a question–response pair, and the second part of the sequence turn 14–15, where it is a social evaluation. The utterance therefore is not a thing in itself but it constitutes an active link between the previous turn or turns and that or those that follow. As such, the turn is not independent of these other turns that it either completes or sets up. But if the turn is not independent of these other turns, here those ascribed to Jennifer, then the content of the turn cannot be ascribed to the individual. Rather, in the same way as the interview process is a *social phenomenon sui generis*, which cannot be reduced to the individual, the content of the utterances is a social phenomenon. This will be even clearer in the next sub-sections.

#### *The Interactional Work of Producing a Topic*

Many analysts use interviews to extract information that is ascribed to individual speakers as if getting information were as easy as putting a brain or spinal tap to the provider. For example, analysts might look at the interview with Jennifer and, based on the transcript, make statements about her life and the influences that have taken her to envision the career of a marine biologist. These analysts treat the interview as if the talk about Bamfield, a conversation with parents concerning the possibility of marine biology as a career, the information about the aquarium in Vancouver as a possible workplace, and so on as expressions of a singular subjectivity, here, Jennifer. But, in fact, the interviewer has not placed a brain tap on Jennifer to let the contents of her mind ooze out—all the analyses in the previous sub-sections provide sufficient evidence showing the contrary. Thus, whether it is Jennifer talking about the time she spent in the Bamfield Marine Center or whether it is Pei-Ling asking about Jennifer's interest in marine biology prior to the Bamfield experience, each presupposes the intelligibility of the talk, both in its intent and its content. Moreover, what Jennifer can say and how she can say it comes with the language that she is using. As a result, what we hear when she talks is not due to utter singularity and subjectivity, but what she says and how she say it is determined by language and its possibilities. These possibilities are cultural rather than being her own as the language but has come to her from the (generalized) Other,

and which, in her talking, is for the (generalized) Other to whom the language returns. But the same is true for the interviewer, Pei-Ling. Both therefore mobilize language and, in so doing, realize its possibilities. This is why we find out about culture and language when we look at the interview and less about Jennifer or, for that matter, Pei-Ling.

Each participant brings a lot of cultural competency to pull of the interview. First, each presupposes that an utterance intended as a question is heard as a question, and an utterance intended as an answer is heard as an answer. That is, each speaker produces sufficient resources so that the utterance is understood and leads to the appropriate next turn. Both form and content of the utterance are such that the respective Other does whatever is implied in the preceding turn at talk. Second, the content of any utterance is such that it presupposes an understanding on the part of the recipient. Therefore, the interviewer cannot just ask any question, and the interviewee cannot just produce any response. Each participant is subject to constraints in the sense that what they say has to take the recipient into account. But if form and content of the utterance takes the recipient into account, then the said cannot be reduced to the speaker alone. What is said belongs to the recipient as well, for whom and for whose benefit the utterance has been produced. No utterance therefore can be reduced to the individual because it always already is the utterance of and for two. Speaking makes sense only if there is hearing, and speaking makes sense only if it addresses itself to the particulars of hearing in terms of intelligibility, possible alternative hearings, and so on.

Jennifer talks about how the possibility of marine biology as a career has emerged from her experiences at the marine center in Bamfield and from a conversation with her parents that have followed some considerations of her own. Now it might appear a description of something solely belonging to Jennifer, when in fact anything she says, because it is said for a recipient, presupposes intelligibility and therefore *cannot be* singular. Talking about “the Bamfield experience,” pondering marine biology as a career, or a conversation with parents presupposes the intelligibility of such events. That is, talk about these instances in Jennifer’s life does not *establish* intersubjectivity but rather, this talk presupposes intersubjectivity. It is therefore not surprising that we find in our database repeated instances where students talk about the experiences they have had at Bamfield Marine Station and how this experience became a resource in subsequent decisions or inclinations.

The topic and its extent are interactionally achieved. Participants produce resources for each other to recognize beginning, continuation, and end of the topic at hand. Thus, as the interviewer, Pei-Ling introduces a new topic, or rather, elaborates on an issue that has been the topic of talk previously, the Bamfield experience, and now requests elaboration in terms of the role this experience has played in the decision to actively consider marine biology as a viable career option. Pei-Ling also provides resources that can be heard as elaborations or continuations of the topic; and she produces evaluations that allow her interlocutor and those who vicariously overhear them to understand that an utterance has not addressed or not sufficiently addressed a preceding utterances intended as a question. Pei-Ling changes the topic, and in so doing, comes to be reaffirmed in the role of that person who in fact may change the topic. That is, being an interviewer is both a resource

and an achievement. It is a resource in the sense that participants may act such that what they do has a recognizable role distribution. But this role distribution does not *determine* the events; it does not *cause* this or that person to behave even though there may be an orientation that mediates and shapes the behavior. At any instant, the events could be otherwise; that they are not but contributing to the recognizability of the event as a traditional interview has to be attributed to the collective as an achievement. It is only if we think in this way that we can understand how a nice evening out turns into marital trouble, how a smooth lecture comes to an abrupt end with the professor leaving class prematurely, and peaceful protests turn into violent events.

In interviews, both speakers contribute to maintain the topic or to lead to a new topic. There is work that the two do. The interviewer orients the interviewee, both in what she says and by nonverbal means, to marine biology as a “good career.” She marks, in asking for further elaborations, that the topic has not yet been completed. And in changing to a new topic, she not only takes the interview into a new direction but also marks the end of the previous topic, and she marks, perhaps, that there is nothing further to be said about the previous topic. Such an assessment, however, may be made only after the fact, at the end of the interview. Thus, for example, in asking about the role of the Bamfield experience in the decision-making process that led to the envisioning of marine biology as a possible career, Pei-Ling actually brought it back and onto the table after it already had been the topic of talk.

#### *The Interactional Achievement of Narrative Coherence*

When we look at and analyze interviews, we can observe a high degree of narrative coherence. That is, there are not just disconnected utterances with topics that have little to do one with the other. Rather, there is a narrative coherence in the transcribed interview text as a whole. Participants talk about one topic, then, often precipitated by a new question, turn to another topic until this one, too, is abandoned as another topic is broached. As a whole, a “good” interview “covers” the domain so that the analysts subsequently can produce a biography, the possible future selves that one or more students articulate, and so on. There is a coherence to the interview text. But this coherence is not due to the person whose life is the topic of talk. Rather, this coherence is an achievement that arises interactionally. The question one might ask is how this narrative coherence is achieved. An important resource is genre, which, in the present case, lies between life history and biography. These genres are cultural possibilities for telling lives, both retrospectively, what has happened in the life of a particular person, and for articulating possible futures. That is, the possible futures articulated in these interviews are not random but are aspects of the way in which we – Pei-Ling, Jennifer, the analyst, readers – understand lives to be constituted. Each life is understood in terms of an unfolding history, which subsequently may be told in the form of a biography or an autobiography. Both genres draw on the same resources, including character and plot, and therefore constitute variants of one and the same genre, auto/biography. There is no difference if, as a result of this interview, Pei-Ling were to write Jennifer’s biogra-

phy or Jennifer were to write her auto/biography. The author changes but plot and character may be exactly the same.

Pei-Ling and Jennifer can talk about the life of the latter, the key experiences that have led her to envision marine biology as a career, and about possible future selves because of genre, plot and character, as a cultural possibility. Pei-Ling can ask the question about the role of the Bamfield experience in the decision about envisioning marine biology because it is intelligible to ask such a question. It makes sense to ask about an experience if, in life history narratives, there are events that shape the future of the protagonist. This then allows the establishment of a narrative coherence in the auto/biography. Jennifer developed to the stage where marine biology has become a serious option as a career, and the Bamfield experience as well as the private deliberations that followed and the announcement to her parents are aspects of the plot. The plot is intelligible, and so are its aspects. The two, the aspects of the plot and the plot as a whole mutually constitute each other. Both the questions asked and the responses provided are in view of establishing coherence in the narrative about Jennifer's past life and the possible futures that she envisions together with Pei-Ling for herself.

One may be tempted to suggest that the difference between the autobiography and biography is that if a person writes about his or her own life, then the resulting narrative is truer and more correct in its details than if someone else, a biographer, had written the text. But this is mistaking author and protagonist (Bakhtin, 1984). Thus, in both biography and autobiography (e.g., Jennifer's), we may find the same protagonist (e.g., "named "Jennifer"). This protagonist is subject to the constraints of the narrative, the plot, in which the protagonist plays a particular character. Whoever the author, the protagonist is subject to narrative constraints that the author is not subject to. These narrative constraints, because culturally shared, make the text independent of the author so that it would be an error to make any special attributions to a narrative in which author and protagonist are conflated.

#### IRREDUCIBILITY OF INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, I provide examples of the evidence that can be mobilized to show that interviews are the result of interactional work. Here, interviews are considered both as context and as text that the interlocutors produce. The participants make available all the resources that they mutually need to make the situation recognizable an interview, and the transcribed text, therefore, the result of an interview. Throughout this chapter I show how interviewer and interviewee collude to produce both context (the interview) and text (the transcript of the conversation). But they produce text and context simultaneously, with the same forms of conversational actions, so that the difference between producing text and producing context becomes undecidable. Conversational figure – what they are talking about – and conversational ground – that which is required for talk to make sense – cannot be distinguished, the presuppose each other, even though social science research often focuses on the text alone. Text and context are produced simultaneously, they are irreducibly the same so that the difference between the two becomes undecidable. But this is also one of the ways in which we may read my text near the quote by

Davidson provided at the outset of this chapter. There is no difference between knowing a language and knowing one's way around the world, that is, there is no difference between knowing how to produce texts with language and knowing to participate in everyday life.

Throughout the chapter we see the intense cooperation to produce not only the context (the interview as event) but also the content (the interview as information captured in the text). What the precise question the interviewer asks is the result of their cooperation that brings forth the precise nature of the question and the precise words being used. What the precise response comes out to be also is a result of an interactional process that includes, at the end, markers of the adequacy of the response achieved. Thus, as soon as the interviewer moves on to another item, she also marks that whatever has been talked about before is being closed. This closure may have different reasons, which even the interviewer may articulate differently from an a posteriori position. But as an interactional moment, moving on signals that there is nothing that further talk can add, at least at this very instant, to what has been said. Fundamentally, therefore, we can consider it to be illegitimate to reduce parts of the text and attribute it to the individual speaker. Doing so is like asking which hand is responsible for the clapping sound; or, conversely, asking what is really in the interviewee's mind is like asking for the sound of one hand clapping. We can also consider the issue under a different light, from a collective perspective, and say that the features we can identify in an interview situation are characteristic of the collective rather than of the individual. Moreover, the observations described in this chapter question the ways in which transcribed interviews frequently are analyzed. Although interviews unfold in time, as a result of the unanticipated give and take between interviewer and interviewee, the transcription, once available, is analyzed as if all the text had been produced simultaneously, as if the speakers knew, at the beginning and end of the event, precisely the same thing. The writings of Mikhail Bakhtin help us here. He uses the concept of the utterance, which, in a face-to-face conversation is the turn. Each turn receives a "social evaluation" in terms of the response (Bakhtin [Volochinov], 1977). The two aspects, utterance and social evaluation belong together. This is why poems, short stories, or novels can be considered utterances, textual productions that are subject to social evaluation as a whole. It is illegitimate to use a synchronic form of analysis to a phenomenon that has a diachronic nature. It is illegitimate unless we assume that the content of each interlocutor's speech is independent of time. This, however, is questionable. We do meet in and as committees because we cannot predict the outcome of the meeting from the present positions, beliefs, forms of knowledge, inclinations, interests, and so on that the committee members bring to the event. If it were in this way, we would not require the meeting but simply input all the information into a computer to calculate the outcome. This, however, will not be possible precisely because the meeting is a collective event irreducible to the contribution of individuals. The minimum unit of analysis of a conversation is not the individual speaker but, at a minimum, the turn pair. That is, the minimum unit of analysis is distributed across at least two speakers. As part of the present examples, however, I also suggest that an individual locution can be seen as both completing the previous turn pair and beginning the next turn pair. The individual turn,



therefore, links together two units that contain two turns at talk each. Seen in this way, the individual turn is irreducible from the collective event as it has to orient itself toward others both retrospectively and prospectively, toward satisfactory completion of a previous event (turn pair) and the successful opening of a coming event (turn pair).

I begin this chapter with a reference to Donald Davidson, who suggests that in the limit there is no difference between knowing a language and knowing one's way around the world. Other philosophers concerned with language and life have made similar statements, articulating the relation of the material and social worlds of our experiences, on the one hand, and our languages, on the other hand, as a tissue, a lacework (Ger. *Geflecht*), in which world and language constitute something like woof and weft. Pulling any one, woof or weft, will make the lacework disappear. Moreover, we do not understand the lacework, its coloring or structure, by analyzing woof or weft on its own. Interviews, too, constitute such a lacework, where language and other aspects of life come together in various ways. In and through language, the participants not only produce the text that will be analyzed but also the very interview as context. That is, in, through, and with language, the participants produce text and context. The difference between text and context becomes undecidable. A question both reasserts the role of the questioner and therefore the interview as a process (context) and it has certain content (text). Both text and context are interactive achievements. The interview text is a protocol of the interactional work in the sense that we can find there what resources participants have made available to each other to pull of the interview as interview.

#### CODA

In this chapter I show how interviews as events and their results in the form of transcribed texts are interactional achievements. Interactions require several constitutive moments and are events that unfold in time. These two characteristics need to be taken into account in our understanding of the texts that we analyze. Our analyses have to take into account both the collective dimension of the resulting product, the transcript, and its temporal constitution by means of utterances and their evaluations. If an analyst takes it as one static text, that is, in its synchronous presence, then it is treated as one utterance. The temporal and collaborative dimensions have been flattened into one plane that no longer allows an appropriate understanding of its nature or the event of which it is the result. The participants orient toward, anticipate, and produce the same structures, which, once produced, they recognize as something reproduced. The process is so mundane that the participants no longer wonder about the fact that they pull off an interview even though it might have been their first. They pulled it off, not because there is but one schema, but a one-way track that constitutes an interview as a box into which the participants move to produce text. Rather, they pull it off creatively, assisting one another and, thereby, achieve their mutual roles. The achievement is contingent. Another interviewer, another instant, another sequence of topics, and the results may have been very different. The very thisness of the interview as process and text is an interactive achievement that neither participant questions even

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though it is easy to imagine many other routes and results that they may have achieved.

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#### APPENDIX

The following transcription conventions are used in this chapter:

tRAve1	Capitalization indicates emphasis;
(0.25)	Pause in one hundredth of seconds;
(.)	Pause of less than one tenth of a second;
biolo[gist]	Brackets indicate degree of overlap of two speakers;
[u:m]	
di=nt	Equal sign indicates latching (no pause) between speakers or in sound production of the same speaker;
. ; , ?	Punctuation transcribes the pitch movement toward the end of the utterance strongly down, slightly down, slightly up, and strongly up, respectively;
<<p>jobs>	P stands for piano, lower than normal speech volume for the bracketed word, here “jobs”;
<<f>yea>	Forte, louder than normal speech;
<<dim>and >	Diminuendo, lessening speech volume;
a::n:d	Each colon indicates lengthening of sound by about one tenth of a second;
↑wELl	Arrow indicates upward jump of pitch;
hh	Release of air, hearable out breathing.