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Introduction

This book is about the workings of language and interaction in the everyday life of institutions. It arose from our long-standing conviction that, while it was all but ignored in conventional analyses of occupational worlds, professions, and organizational environments, the study of interaction had much to offer to the analysis of these domains of social life. Accordingly, in the early 1990s we decided to start a seminar that applied the emerging findings of conversation analysis to occupational environments of various kinds. At that time, studies of this sort were few and far between, and concentrated in a limited range of domains, notably courtroom interaction, 911 emergency, and mass communication. Our seminar was correspondingly small, attracting perhaps a dozen intrepid participants.

Since that time, the field has expanded dramatically. Conversation analytic (CA) research, once all but absent from the doctor's office, has now become an established presence in the field of medicine, where it is used to examine everything from genetic counseling to surgery. It has also colonized the world of business, from business meetings and decision making to, perhaps especially, the examination of technology-in-use. In education, CA has advanced from classroom lessons to embrace more far-flung enterprises such as one-on-one pedagogy, disciplinary hearings, and parent–teacher conferences. In the socio-legal area, a focus on formal trials has given way to a more differentiated range of studies encompassing the more informal legal proceedings such as mediation, arbitration, and plea bargaining. The study of 911 emergency has broadened to embrace an ever-widening array of help lines and support services. Mass media research has exhibited a similar diversification, with the initial news interview research joined by studies of campaign debates, radio call-in shows, and talk shows of various stripes. This growth and diversification is not confined to the English-speaking world; it is a world-wide phenomenon embracing many languages and diverse cultures.

In the meantime, our small seminar expanded to a large-scale lecture course that has been taken by students who now number in the thousands. Naturally there are limits to what can be covered within the confines of a 10-week course and, rather than spread ourselves too thinly, we chose to cover a smaller range of environments in a sustained way. Accordingly, while our teaching registered the many advances of an evolving field, three main criteria determined our selection of topics. We focused on domains of interaction that, first, have intrinsic interest as specimens of the everyday world; second, have significant outcomes for individuals and the society of which they are a part; and third, have an exemplary status

within a continuum of social contexts: private versus public, formal versus informal, and professional versus bureaucratic. This book is based on those choices.

It is important to emphasize that our aim is not to draw a dividing line between ordinary conversation and interaction that is professional, task-focused, or "institutional". This is because we do not believe that a clear dividing line can be drawn. Most important in this regard is the fact that practices of interaction in the everyday world are unavoidably drawn on in every kind of institutional interaction. For example, a witness in court may be confined by a variety of rules of legal process, but she will still deploy her ordinary conversational competences in constructing the details of her testimony. By the same token, the kind of rhetorical formulations used to persuade others in political speeches are also to be found in argumentative conversations over the dinner table and at the office water cooler. For this reason, we do not propose any hard-and-fast distinction between "ordinary conversation" on the one hand and "institutional talk" on the other. Rather, we investigate the ways in which ordinary conversational practices are brought to bear in task-focused interactions. Because the tasks of these interactions are recurrent, so too are the specific practices that they frequently engage. For this reason, we can fairly readily observe systematic relationships between practices of interaction on the one hand, and institutional tasks and identities on the other. It is the intersections between interactional practices, social identities, and institutional tasks that lie at the heart of this book.

These intersections take many forms. To prepare for their analysis, we begin with a theoretical and methodological overview of conversation analysis and its application to occupations and institutions. These chapters (2–4) provide an account of the theoretical origins of CA in the work of Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel, and explicate the methodology of CA and how it can be applied to institutional settings. We then offer an overview of different levels of analysis of institutional interaction that will be in evidence throughout the book.

The body of the book centers on four main institutional domains: calls to 911 emergency (chapters 5–7), doctor–patient interaction (chapters 8–11), courtroom trials (chapters 12–14), and mass communication (chapters 15–18). The pioneering work of Don Zimmerman and his colleagues established 911 calls as one of the first applications of CA to an institutional task. The domain is a useful starting point both because of its intrinsic interest and also because the overwhelming task focus of these calls starkly exemplifies the extent to which a task's organizational imperatives can shape multiple aspects of interactional organization and practice. 911 calls also highlight the extent to which the personal circumstances and emotional states of participants are enmeshed with, and become adjusted to, the demands of the business at hand.

In our second domain, doctor–patient interaction, we focus on primary care, in part because it is the largest part of the health care system, and also because of its clear exemplification of professionalism in action. Here we focus on the twin themes of professional authority and personal accountability in medical decision making by both doctors and their patients, and also on ways in which authority and accountability are challenged and contested.

For the third domain, we focus on one of the earliest applications of conversation analysis to a social institution: formal trial proceedings. In contrast to our first two domains, which essentially involve private interactions, trials are public events and are regulated by public and highly codified rules of conduct. Here we address the bookends of the trial process: examination of witnesses, and jury deliberations. In both areas, our analysis concerns how legal codes, rules of procedure, and the "facts of the case" are selectively deployed and

creatively articulated in the give and take of often contentious interactional processes. We also examine processes of informal dispute resolution, which have assumed an ever-increasing role in the legal system.

Our final domain, mass communication in the form of broadcast news interviews, news conferences, and political speeches, is also highly public in character. Our primary focus is on how the competing journalistic norms of objectivity and adversarialness are reconciled and implemented in practice, and how interviewees strive to stay on message in an environment of interrogation. We also consider political speeches, which are of course a context in which it is relatively easy to stay on message. However, in this form of interaction en masse, public speakers face the task of keeping audiences attentive and mobilizing their support. We examine the rhetorical resources that speakers deploy to this end, and show some ways in which these resources can, outlasting the speech itself, pass from utterance to history.

In our class at UCLA, we found that we were not only examining particular institutional domains, but also introducing our students to the methodology of conversation analysis. Studying institutions, we found, was a motivation for our students to learn the techniques of interactional analysis necessary to get at the workings of human organizations. Our class necessarily had a kind of double curriculum, which is carried over into this book. Accordingly, our aim is to be exemplary rather than encyclopedic in the hope that we will attract interest in both the institutions and the interactional practices through which they are talked into being.