

Notes on Overlap Management in Conversation: The Case of Delayed Completion

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A turn-taking system allocates speaking turns in conversation. Nonetheless, on occasion speakers start up "out of turn." This report examines one procedure, Delayed Completion, that speakers use to finish a discontinued turn after an intervening utterance by another speaker. Speakers employ resources intrinsic to the turn-taking system, such as the projectability of turn unit completion, to regain turn occupancy and to locate the utterance of the out-of-turn speaker as having been interruptive. When the intervening utterance makes a next action relevant, Delayed Completion can also cancel the relevance of that next action.

ONE BASIC TYPE OF SOCIAL COORDINATION achieved by conversation participants is the moment-by-moment allocation of speaking turns. Fundamental to this accomplishment is the practice of beginning a speaking turn at a place where the current turn *might* come to completion. This practice does not preclude participants from starting to speak elsewhere in the course of another speaker's turn. Speaking turns that begin elsewhere, however, may be met with procedures to enforce the practice of starting at possible completion places.

This report describes one procedure that speakers use when faced with the onset of talk by another participant before a possible completion place is reached. Delayed Completion can be given the following preliminary characterization. In the course of talking, speakers sometimes delay the final part of their utterance after the onset of talk by another participant. This procedure can be seen in the following transcribed fragments of conversation.

(1) [GTS]

Dan: as a matter of fact we may not have a group going
after [the uh

Roger: [maybe you're
screening 'em too hard

→ Dan: next couple of weeks

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(2) [FRANKEL:HOUSEBURNING]

Pen: I don' wanna make yih ta:lk cuz I don't wantche tuh:

(.)

Pat: No: I f- I really *do* feel a lot [bettuh (I feel like)]

- Pen: [upset chiself a]ll over agai:n,

Before examining Delayed Completion, I discuss the practice of beginning speaking turns at possible completion places. This report then presents a description of Delayed Completion as a device for resolving overlap. Later sections examine the relationship of Delayed Completion to "interruption" and to "sequences of actions" in conversation.

THE PROJECTABILITY OF POSSIBLE COMPLETION

A central feature of conversational interaction is turn-taking. Though turn size and turn order are not predetermined, the way in which speaker change is achieved results ordinarily in one party speaking at a time. This achievement takes moment-by-moment participant coordination. Central to this accomplishment is the regular practice of changing speakers at possible utterance completion places.

To account for the practice of speakers beginning to speak at possible completion places, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have identified the "turn-constructional unit" as a component of the turn taking system for conversation. One resource that participants use to coordinate the smooth transfer of speakership from a current speaker to a next speaker is the projectability of possible utterance completion places in the course of an utterance. The "space" around these places of possible completion is treated by participants (both current speaker and possible next speakers) as a locus for possible speaker transition. The completion place must be characterized as "possible" because the actual place a turn-constructional unit is completed may not coincide with the first possible completion place being projected for the turn-constructional unit currently underway. In (3) N starts speaking at possible completion places, which turn out not to be actual unit completion places.

(3) [Hyla:simplified]

H: I was deciding if I should write him the thank you no:t

- N: [fer the] birthday gift,

[Yea:h]

H: I decided no:t to [though

- N: [How co:me,

For an utterance to be part of this coordination system, that is for an utterance to be usable as a turn-constructional unit, it must have a recognizable completion, and that completion must be recognizable prior to its occurrence. This is necessary because transition from one speaker to the next is coordinated by reference to possible utterance completion.

The proposal of participant orientation to recognizable, projectable completion is important to the current discussion in two ways. (1) It is

at least in part by reference to the availability of what constitutes a possibly complete turn unit that some occasions of next speaker start-ups are characterizable as "out of turn." (2) If an utterance is halted before reaching a possible completion place, its "unfinishedness" is available as a resource for the production of subsequent talk.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENON

Speakers occasionally delay the final part of their utterance.

(4) [GTS]

- Dan: as a matter of fact we may not have a group going after
 [the uh
 Roger: [maybe you're screening 'em too hard
 → Dan: next couple of weeks

It is not quite accurate to call an utterance such as "next couple of weeks" the final part of an earlier utterance. The problem is that to speak of an utterance as a "final part" misses a central feature of talk in interaction. Every aspect of talk in interaction is an accomplishment of the participants producing that talk. Stopping an utterance provides a participant with the future opportunity to produce a Delayed Completion, but does not mandate its production. Other actions are possible as in (5) (cf. Goodwin, 1980, footnote 12).

(5) HIC:I

- D: I'm sayin' (.) that when it comes to one or two people gettin
 c- complete control of the club=
 Da: =yer contradicting yers[elf right here]
 → D: [awright what]

Here D relinquishes the turn to Da, rather than attempting to regain it through Delayed Completion.

Delayed Completion is not the "final part" of a single utterance. Rather it is another utterance that by its form (as a syntactically fitted continuation) and its position (as current speaker's next utterance) attains the status of Delayed Completion of a prior utterance. In (4), Dan discontinues his utterance and then constructs his next utterance as a Delayed Completion.

Another feature of Delayed Completion seen in (4) is the talk by another speaker ("maybe you're screening 'em too hard") before the prior utterance's projectable completion. Delayed Completion links a speaker's current utterance to their just prior syntactically unfinished utterance. This linkage occurs across the talk of another participant. The linkage is produced by constructing a current utterance as a syntactically fitted continuation of one's own prior utterance. Finally, the Delayed Completion not only continues, but completes the turn-constructural unit begun in the earlier utterance.¹

OVERLAP RESOLUTION

Delayed Completion can provide a way to bring an unfinished turn-constructural unit to completion in the clear after another speaker

initiates an utterance in the course of that turn unit. Thus it can be seen as an overlap management device.² As such it is an unlikely, even a counter-intuitive type of device, since the overlap of utterances is initially resolved by the current speaker dropping out. But one may discontinue an utterance to accomplish a strategic withdrawal. Delayed Completion can then provide a way to successfully reclaim the turn space.³

There are other procedures available to participants for resolving overlap. For example speakers sometimes simply talk through the overlap in an unperturbed fashion as if it were not happening (Jefferson, 1984). This can be seen in (6).

(6) [HIC]

((Sparky is addressing Kerry))

- Sparky: it sounds like what you're saying is that
 - let them make the decisions
 Kerry: (if this is)

Delayed Completion and "unperturbed continuation" are differentially available to participants. Unperturbed continuation can be used by current speaker, by next speaker, or by both speakers as a way of making an unmarked claim on the turn space. Delayed Completion, however, seems to be a current speaker device. It is only available to the speaker who has already produced enough of an utterance prior to the overlap to be able later to produce an utterance which will be recognizable as a completion of that prior utterance.⁴

TWO GENERALIZATIONS OF THE PHENOMENON

Delayed Completion Without Simultaneous Speech

In each of the instances of Delayed Completion presented so far, the simultaneous claims for turn occupancy have entailed simultaneous speech by two participants. However, the entry of a next speaker into the turn at other than a possible completion place need not result in overlapping talk. The fact that interjacent onset, to use Jefferson's (1986) term, need not engender simultaneous speech can be seen in Roger's entry in (7).

(7) [GTS]

- Ken: Seems like every week somebody- somebody in this group gets stepped on *royal*. Somebody gets- gets com
 - Roger: Why doncha all step on me.
 Ken: pletely cremated.

As this example illustrates, participants have the ability to control the production of their speech to the extent that a current speaker can stop midword at the onset of talk by another speaker. Certainly the "m" (in "com") lends itself to stopping, since onset of talk at its completion only requires that an unvoiced bilabial stop ("p") be held, rather than a current sound be cut off. This would suggest that very little simultaneous speech, especially beyond the first syllable of overlap, is anything other than some sort of participant procedure.⁵

Moreover, though there is no simultaneous speech, the same overlap management device is used as when simultaneous speech does occur. Though interjacent entry by a next speaker where no overlapping talk occurs may not be equivalent to entry with overlapping talk, this type of entry is nonetheless treated as overlap, but now "overlap" captures a feature of conversational interaction and not an acoustic fact.

Delayed Completion of a "Completed" Turn

Though initially Delayed Completion has been presented as an overlap management device (where overlap has been respecified to include turn space overlap without simultaneous speech), it can also be turned to other uses—or more precisely to the *same* use under other circumstances. It can be used to turn a potentially complete turn-constructional unit into merely the first part of the turn-constructional unit that the Delayed Completion now finishes (cf. Schegloff, 1987, p. 78).

(8) [GTS]

Roger: I don' wanna accept that responsibility. (0.7) cause I'm not trained along those lines
(.)

Dan: Mh=

Roger: =so I wanna bu- I don' wanna raise an underachiever. (0.2) an an i(f)-'n further the problem. (0.4) perpetuate the=uh (0.3) underachiever, (0.6) so ah'll just leave it (.) to somebody who is (0.2)

Dan: you're not going to have children?
(.)

— Roger: so trained, (.) t'have children.

Here the Delayed Completion ("so trained, to have children.") locates the prior utterance as interruptive of the now completed turn-constructional unit. In addition, since the Delayed Completion is built to be a continuation of current speaker's prior utterance, it deletes the sequential implicativeness of the next speaker's intervening question. Though the question is in effect answered, that "answer" is not built as an answer to a question.

INTERRUPTION AND OVERLAP

Not all overlap constitutes interruption. However, by producing an utterance which is a syntactic continuation of one's own prior utterance, speakers can claim to be merely continuing a turn-constructional unit-in-progress as in (9) and (10). The continuation (i.e., the Delayed Completion) is thereby asserted to be part of the same turn space occupied by that prior utterance, thus characterizing the intervening utterance as interruptive of the now finished single turn-constructional unit. Interruption is achieved in the talk through the production of the Delayed Completion.

(9) [GTS]

- Ken: My opinion of the school system, the Los Angeles school district, dis-
district, is the most fucked over,
Roger: Yeah well we [all got that opinion.
- Ken: [school syst'm WAIT is the most fucked over school
system in the world.

(10) [FRANKEL:HOUSEBURNING]

- Pen: I don' wanna make yih ta:lk cuz I don't wantche tuh:
(.)
Pat: No: I f- I really *do* feel a lot [bettuh (I feel like)]
- Pen: [upset chiself a'll over agai:n,

Since Delayed Completion locates the intervening utterance as interruptive, it can also provide a warrant for the *initiation* of overlap. Current speaker, in effect, has a warrant to "violate the violater."

Though speakers sometimes wait until the first possible completion place in the intervening utterance to produce the Delayed Completion as in (7), there are at least two systematic reasons for a Delayed Completion to be started prior to the first projected completion place.

First, speakers have techniques available to them to extend the size of their turns as they approach a possible completion place. For example, Schegloff (1982, 1987) has described a "rush through" technique in which a speaker, "speeds up the talk and runs the intonation contour and phrasing across the completion point" (1987, p. 77). Once an additional turn-constructional unit begins, it becomes more difficult (though not impossible) for the speaker of the discontinued turn to tie an utterance to an earlier utterance.

Second, not only might present speakers attempt to extend their talk at the first possible completion place, but since completion has transition relevance, there is always the possibility, at least in multiparty talk, that another speaker will be selected or will self-select to speak next.

(11) HIC:4

- C: How come we have two copies of the second annual meeting an' they're
different meetings?
(.)
M: cause probably ones for seventy
s'ix an ones fer
K: [ones a continuation] of it.
- C: Oh.

By speaking next, a third participant will be speaking just after and by reference to the interjacently begun utterance. This act ratifies the interjacent utterance as a turn at talk. In this way the opportunity to finish the discontinued turn-constructional unit, and importantly to *regain the position of having produced the prior utterance to some next utterance*, is all but lost. This is vital for Delayed Completion, since it operates by deleting the implicativeness of the interjacent utterance for subsequent talk rather than by stopping a next speaker from speaking (e.g., by drowning out or outlasting a competitor).

At this point the following features of Delayed Completion have been presented.

1. Delayed Completion provides a means to produce a complete turn-constructural unit across intervening talk. Thus it is a means to resolve overlap in conversation and to regain a speaking turn.

2. Delayed Completion can make out an intervening utterance to have been interruptive of a turn at talk.

3. Delayed Completion can initiate overlap. The claim of interruption provides a warrant for the initiation of overlap. The fact that it is sequentially important to start before the intervening utterance comes to a possible completion place provides a systematic basis for the initiation of overlap.

4. Delayed completion can delete the sequential implicativeness of the intervening talk. For example, a question implicates the next action of an answer. The production of a Delayed Completion after a question can cancel the relevance of an answer as a next action.

With these features of Delayed Completion in mind, I will now turn to a description of the use of this device within one type of conversational sequence, the Collaborative Turn Sequence. I first present a brief description of this sequence type. Then I examine the place of Delayed Completion within this sequence.

COLLABORATIVE TURN SEQUENCES

In the course of one speaker's turn, a next speaker begins to speak, producing an utterance which is a syntactically fitted continuation of the current speaker's utterance-in-progress. This second utterance preemptively completes the turn-constructural unit of the just prior speaker as in (12).⁶

(12) [US]

- Rich: if you bring it intuh them
 – Carol: ih don't cost yuh nothing

Preemptive completion makes relevant a next action for prior speaker in next turn. This action is the acceptance or rejection of the preemptive completion as a proper continuation and completion of the preempted turn-constructural unit.

(13) [CDHQ:II]

- Marty: Now most machines don't record that slow. So I'd wanna- when I make a tape,
 Josh: be able tuh speed it up.
 – Marty: Yeah.

The features of this sequence type are simply being asserted to continue the analysis of Delayed Completion. A complete characterization of collaborative turn sequences can be found in Lerner (1987).

SEQUENTIAL DELETION

The acceptance *or* rejection of the preemptive completion as a version of what was about to be said ratifies the preemptive completion as *the* completion. However, the preempted speaker can also produce another completion (i.e., a Delayed Completion), rather than ratify the status of the preemptive completion as a continuation of the turn unit-in-progress.

In (14), a Delayed Completion ("en not gain weight") occurs in receipt position.

(14) [Labov:TA]

- C: Fact I said tuh *Larry* yuh don't *think* it's- thet- y'know that the kids thet'r skinny, (0.7) are gonnuh yihknow haftuh *worry* about it. They c'n eat *twice* iz much iz you.
 D: en it doesn't mean [anything
 - C: [en not gain wei::ght.

Delayed Completion is used to reclaim the speakership of a turn-constructural unit, thus deleting the relevance of a receipt.

To terminate the relevance of the receipt, the utterance done in the receipt slot must be heard as a Delayed Completion of the speaker's earlier utterance and not as a repeat of the preemptive completion. Some Delayed Completions accomplish this through their formulation as a competing completion.

(15) [GTS]

- Ken: no its when he turns a bright red that everybody has to start worrying
 Louise: no when he gets his eyes like this an' he starts thinkin, you know
 Ken: then you get to worry
 - Louise: then you think he's gonna fall asleep.

The discordance of a competing completion constitutes it as a rival completion for the turn unit. However, a receipt positioned utterance which is not discordant, but a repeat, extension, or revision of the preemptive completion may not be easily distinguishable to recipients from a receipt of the preemptive completion, as in B's utterance ("yer gonna meet people you know") in (16).

(16) [DTA:simplified]

- B: you don't go primarily because alcohol is obtainable there. You go there cz its a whole social interaction. Your gonna be doing other things, your gunna hustle ladies, your gonna see stuff
 [yer yer
 C: [() gonna meet people
 - B: yer gonna meet people you know

Unless the receipt positioned utterance is specifically formulated as a replacement for the preemptive utterance, it may not be recognizable as a Delayed Completion. Thus use of overlap can achieve this.

One way to make a Delayed Completion recognizable is to start it in the course of the preemptive completion, as in (17).

(17) [HIC]

- Sparky: it sounds like what you're saying is that let them make the decisions
 Kerry: an let us know wh^{at} it is
 - Sparky: and let us know what it is

The preemptive completion of a turn-constructural unit provides a systematic locus for Delayed Completion as a receipt slot alternative to producing a receipt. The production of Delayed (non-discordant) Completions provides a systematic place within collaborative turn sequence organization for the occurrence of overlapping talk.

The initiation of a preemptive completion implicates a receipt for next turn. The receipt slot provides a place to acknowledge the preemptive completion as the proper continuation of the turn unit-in-progress. However, the receipt slot alternative to acceptance does not constitute an explicit rejection of the completion. Rather, Delayed Completion can be used to produce an alternative, possibly competing completion which deletes the sequential relevance of the preemptive completion.

The occurrence of a preemptive completion makes relevant the alternative possibilities of finishing the preempted turn-constructural unit with a Delayed Completion, or ratifying the preemptive completion as the proper continuation of the turn-constructural unit with a receipt. In either case, what the turn-constructural unit-in-progress will come to be remains the province of the speaker who initiated the turn.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Delayed Completion is a device used by speakers in conversational interaction. It is one procedure for resolving overlap begun by interjacent entry into a turn by a next speaker. Delayed Completion is differentially available to participants. It is a current speaker device whose use reasserts the entitlement of a speaker to produce a complete turn a talk. That is, Delayed Completion reasserts the entitlement of a speaker to produce an utterance up to a possible completion. As such it represents an instance of social action within the space of a turn at talk.

In addition, it is a device which is shaped by a basic practice of talk in interaction. This is the minimization of overlap. Delayed Completion is an overlap management device apparently used to minimize overlapping talk by requiring a speaker to drop out at the onset of another speaker's utterance.

Delayed Completion relies on features of turn taking such as the projectability of possible utterance completion. Thus it provides further support for the claim of participant orientation to these features. This is especially interesting, since this orientation is being shown in the course of a violation of standard turn taking practice.

This research might contribute to other investigations by clarifying how Delayed Completion entails the location of a just prior utterance as interruptive. When this occurs, one participant of a conversation is characterizing another as an interrupter. It might be useful to include the

activity of interactionally dubbing another as an interrupter in the examination of the conversational activities that constitute relationships.

Some researchers in the field (e.g. Bell, 1985; Street & Murphy, 1987) employ a concept of interruption which includes some form of simultaneous speech. It might be useful to distinguish between simultaneous speech and interjacent entry, since it is possible to have interjacent entry into a turn space without simultaneous speech.

NOTES

1. Delayed completion can be seen as one device for achieving what Sacks (1971, Spring lectures, April 9 and April 12) referred to as "skip-connecting."

2. The treatment of other aspects of overlapping talk in conversation, both its onset and resolution, can be found in the Conversation Analysis literature (e.g. Jefferson, 1973; Jefferson & Schegloff, 1975; Jefferson, 1983; Schegloff, 1987).

3. One issue here is the extent to which the *form* of the discontinuation projects additional talk. Note, for example, the form of the discontinuation ("the uh") in (4). By initiating what seems like a word search Dan may be formulating his upcoming silence as merely a pause within his turn, rather than as a withdrawal from the competition for the turn, thus allowing him to retain a claim to speakership. Schegloff (1984, p. 271-272) describes the "freezing" of a gesture as another way to retain a claim to speakership after having dropped out of an overlap.

4. On the other hand, at least one *next* speaker device has also been identified. Schegloff (1987) describes the use of "recycled turn beginnings" as such a device. He provides the following example,

[Schegloff, 1987, p. 75]

- R: Well the uhm in fact they must have grown a culture, you know,
they must've- I mean how long- he's been in the hospital for a few
days, right? Takes a-bout a week to grow a culture.]
- K: I don' think they grow a] I
- don think they grow a culture to do a biopsy.

The turn beginning ("I don' think they grow a") is halted at just the point the current speaker stops and is repeated from the beginning, but now done in the clear.

5. Not only can speakers stop in the middle of a word at the onset of talk by another, but this control extends to the regulation of the seemingly spontaneous action of laughing. A participant producing laughter can be sensitive to the onset of speech in the course of the laughter and can stop laughing at that onset (Jefferson, 1974).

6. Preemptive completion is different in one important way from the interjacent entry seen earlier. Preemptive entry is specifically built to be a continuation of the turn unit which is currently underway and not a bid to begin a new turn.

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Speech in Telephone Openings: Emergent Interaction v. Routines

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Telephone openings are of theoretical interest to discourse analysts in that they occur in speech only, and begin at definite moments. The present inquiry traces a sequential model of four routine slots in telephone openings. This model is tested against tape recorded and transcribed data in naturally-occurring telephone openings. A distinct minority of telephone openings proceed precisely as the model might predict. However, routines do provide templates against which emergent usages are marked. The essay discusses implications for the nature of interaction, the cultural universality of the sequential model, and generalizability of these findings to other speech events.

THE FIRST FEW SECONDS of any communicative encounter structure its progress and outcomes. At encounter openings, parties recognize and greet each other, then move into conversation. Face-to-face openings are difficult to describe in detail, in part because the texts are largely visual, and in part because communicative activity is braided into other actions such as walking or working.

We gain fresh understanding of encounter openings by describing the first few seconds of telephone calls. Telephone calls are pure speech and display definite moments of beginning. Interactions at telephone openings are simplified enough to allow study, yet ecologically rich enough to support both in-depth analysis and generalization of findings.

This essay presents a sequential model describing routine telephone openings. The model is based in conversation analyses provided by both Schegloff and Sacks. I report tests of this model against details of tape recordings of naturally-occurring telephone openings between friends and business associates.

Some scholars have underestimated encounter openings, in part by describing them as simply ritual or phatic. Weinreich, for example, urges scholars to avoid descriptions of phatic events and instead "to examine language under conditions of its full-fledged utilization" (1963, 147).

Sacks takes issue with this *a priori* dismissal of routine talk, arguing (1) that investigators cannot know in advance of inquiry which