

RESPONSIVE LIST CONSTRUCTION A Conversational Resource for Accomplishing Multifaceted Social Action

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Research by Gail Jefferson has established that list construction in conversation can be used to perform a range of interactional tasks. This report provides an extension and application of Jefferson's work to demonstrate how this practice can be used to produce a delicately formulated, multifaceted response. A preliminary characterization of a single case of responsive list construction is presented. Next, the practice of list construction is described. List construction can be used to formulate a class of objects through an inductive procedure by moving from the particular to the general. This feature of list construction can be used to correct an error in an unexposed fashion by recasting a problematic, but possibly complete, remark as merely the first item in a list. These features of list construction are then applied as analytic resources in a further explication of an individual utterance presented at the outset of the report. Responsive list construction can be used to achieve a qualified acceptance of a prior speaker's utterance by incorporating that utterance into a list of related items, thus in effect balancing multiple social concerns.

Talk in interaction constitutes the empirical intersection of scholarly interests in "language" and "social psychology"—and studies such as the present one transform and "interactionalize" both elements of that conjunction. Language structure furnishes resources for accomplishing the moment-to-moment assembly of social interaction, but that structure must be respecified in social-sequential terms, as those structures must be situated in the hands of the participants themselves. On the other hand, because the conduct of individuals in interaction is a concerted, moment-by-moment contingent achievement of those individuals as participants, that conduct's orderliness can be found in the shared practices of participation, and so a social psychology must aim at describing those practices that provide the possibility of individual actions.

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In this report, I first introduce a short excerpt of talk in interaction and suggest that one of the speakers is possibly performing some rather delicate actions through the design of one of his utterances. I then describe the "technical machinery" or shared practices of responsive list construction needed to ground this claim. Finally, I return to the initial excerpt to show how these practices accomplish the proposed delicate actions in the local sequential circumstances found there.

The following excerpt is taken from a group therapy session for teenagers in which Dan is the therapist and Roger is one of the teenage members of the group:¹

- (1) [GTS]
 1 Dan: well I do know last week that uh Al was certainly very
 2 (0.6)
 3 Roger: pi [ssed off
 4 → Dan: [upset, 'n pissed off, 'n angry en w'z bout ready tuh fi:ght
 5 uh with Ken

Several preliminary observations can be made. First, Dan stops talking before his utterance has reached a recognizable possible completion. In addition, the turn-constructional unit in progress strongly projects what sort of unit part has been left unsaid or at least has not yet been said. The talk up to the silence at Line 2 projects a next part that will be taken up with characterizing how Al was last week. And it is this next unit part, minimally a single word, that will bring Dan's turn-constructional unit to a first possible completion place. The silence can thereby be considered on its occurrence (at least initially) to be a pause within Dan's turn at talk and not a gap after its completion. The exigencies of turn-taking organization mandate that his coparticipants will at least initially take it that he will resume talking, and in resuming he will complete the yet-to-be-completed unit type.

A second cluster of observations can be gained by noting that another participant, Roger, begins talking during the silence. As the silence is analyzable as a pause in Dan's turn, Roger is thereby starting to talk within the turn space of the prior speaker. Further, Roger produces something that could properly come after "very." It is grammatically fitted to the prior, not yet finished turn-constructional unit as a continuation and possible completion. He is producing a version of what Dan's utterance could come to.

A third and for the time being final observation is that Dan does produce further talk ("upset, 'n pissed off, 'n angry") that seems both to complete his earlier unfinished utterance and to acknowledge Roger's utterance in a rather delicate manner by not exactly accepting it but not exactly rejecting it either. How is this accomplished? What practices of talk in interaction are being employed here?

LIST CONSTRUCTION AS A FEATURE OF TALK

The feature of Dan's second utterance, which serves both to complete his own prior talk and to acknowledge Roger's, is its construction as a list (Jefferson, 1990). I first describe how list construction serves as a systematic resource for participants in conversation and then return to Excerpt (1) and reexamine it in the light of this resource showing how list construction is applied there.

Jefferson (1990) has proposed that lists constructed in conversation regularly, although not exclusively, have a three-part structure. This three-partedness, she argues, is programmatically relevant for the construction of lists. Specifically, she shows that both speakers and recipients of lists orient to a three-part structure. Speakers regularly produce three-part lists. The following excerpt contains three distinct three-part lists:

- (2) [CIRC:Simon]
 Teacher: This 'too' has an extra 'o'(.) so that's a plus plus plus (.) plus plus plus (.) like too:: big, (0.2) too:: many, (0.2) too:: far

Lists are regularly built in three parts even when there are less than three actual items—in which case a generalized list completer can be used. In Excerpt (3), Keith begins a list with two specific items, then pauses to search for a third list-completing item. Finally, he completes the list but produces something other than a specific third item:

- (3) [Electioneering]
 Keith: We were building, camps, and airfields and, uh, everything like that.

Here the list is constructed in three parts even when no third item seems to be available and a search is required to produce something in the projected third-item slot.

Why a three-part structure? I would like to suggest a systematic basis for this empirical regularity. List construction, as a situated social achievement in conversation, is shaped by the social coordination systems that organize conversational interaction. Two systematic features are of particular relevance here: the turn-taking system mandate for recognizable turn unit completions (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and the preference for minimization (see Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). Three-part list construction seems to contain features that make it consistent with the operation of turn taking and the minimization preference. Minimization can be thought of roughly as requiring list structure to be kept as short as possible while still performing the interactional work that requires listing. The following

discussion examines how turn taking and minimization shape list construction.

From a traditional linguistic standpoint, "there is no intrinsic limit on the number of conjuncts a coordinate structure can have . . . for length alone never renders such a sentence ungrammatical" (Langacker, 1973, p. 113). In other words, a sentence, in theory at least, can be of infinite length, as an infinite number of clauses (conjuncts) can be conjoined with elements like "and." From this perspective, lists are seen as reduced versions of conjoined clauses. However, given the transitory nature of human life, not to mention the requirements of social organization, one might suspect that there would be a practical, if not linguistically intrinsic, limit on such conjoining. Turn taking imposes such a limit because utterances that can be used to produce a turn at talk must project possible completion places.

List completion can be oriented to by recipients as possible utterance completion—the place a next speaker might properly begin speaking. The production of a final item of a list can be recognizable as and treated as a possible utterance completion place, as Tony does at Line 5 of Excerpt (4):

- (4) [Adato]
 1 Matt: The good actors are all dyin out.
 2 Tony: They're all- they're all dyin out [yeah
 3 Matt: Tyrone Po:wuh. Clark Gable,
 4 Gary Cooper,
 5 → Tony: Now all of 'em are dyin.

Recipients can use the three-partedness of emerging lists to project list completion and thereby project possible utterance completion. To project possible completion in this way, turns designed as lists must be recognizable as such prior to their completion. In the above excerpt, Tony does not wait until Matt has stopped (which would be marked by a slight pause at the end of Line 4) but begins at the end of the third item of the list without waiting to see whether Matt will continue. The recognizability of completion alone does not require lists to be limited to three parts, but three seems to be the minimum number of parts needed to demonstrate that one is doing listing. I am not saying here that lists cannot be shorter than three (or longer) but that it is, in part, in the projection of a third part (e.g., in the design of the second part) that a speaker demonstrates that a list is under way. In fact, a list in progress can be completed by a recipient after the production of a second item shows a list to be in progress, as in Excerpt (5). (At Line 1, "it" refers to a Middle Eastern dessert.)

- (5) [Adato]
 1 J: they make it in Greece, Turke::y,
 2 → B: Armenia

This suggests that a list in progress is recognizable as a list not only prior to its completion but prior to the onset of its final component. The production of the second item as the second part of a list can mark an utterance as a list in progress, thus providing the resources for a recipient to produce an anticipatory completion of the list.

The design of the second item as a second yet not final item marks the utterance retrospectively and prospectively as a list in progress. Even if a recipient shows that they anticipate continued talk as Ken's continuer (Schegloff, 1982) at Line 2 of Excerpt (6) does, it is not until the second item is produced at Line 3 as a list item that the utterance is shown to be a list in progress. It is the recognizability of a list in progress from the design of the second item that furnishes the possibility of anticipatory completion (Lerner, 1991) by another speaker, as at Line 4:

- (6) [GTS:3]
 1 Louise: first of all they hit rain.
 2 Ken: Mm hm
 3 Louise: then they hit hail.
 4 → Ken: and then they hit snow,

There is another aspect of minimization that seems relevant here. Lists require no more than three parts to establish that a class of items is being invoked. This is shown in Excerpt (7):

- (7) [JG:II(a)]
 Heather: And they had like a concession stand like at a fair where you can buy coke and popcorn and that type of thing.

Using an analogy marker ("like"), Heather designs her turn to gain recognition from an unknowing recipient by connecting the target referent, "concession stand" to another (possibly recognizable) referent. The list at the end of her turn provides a sense of what sorts of things could be purchased at the target concession stand. Her list construction operates as an induction device. The first two items are needed to establish the dimensions or range of class membership, and the generalized list completer transforms the list from being merely a collection of items to a reference to the class.

Not only do speakers use list construction to formulate a class in this way, but recipients can also formulate a class of items as a way to complete a list in progress, as Sally does at Line 6 in Excerpt (8):

- (8) [Sally Ann]
 1 Sheila: then I turn on the tee vee; (0.2)
 2 an' I wanna watch (.) Cheers
 3 Sally: mm hm
 4 Sheila: or (0.7) Bill Cosby=or
 5 (0.2)
 6 → Sally: some show thatchu wanna watch

Here, Sheila begins a list of the programs that she looks forward to watching on television. At Line 6, Sally produces a third and final part to the list but does not furnish a specific item. Instead, she produces a description that sums up the class of items—that is, she completes the list by producing a class formulation for the list that the prior items instantiate.²

So there seems to be a systematic basis for three-partedness. In explicating that basis, I have shown that lists can be recognizable in the course of their production and that they can be used to formulate a class reference. I now turn to several other types of interactional work that list construction can accomplish to develop the analytic resources needed to return to an analysis of the list presented at the beginning of this report.

Listing can be used to extend and transform a possibly completed utterance. The issue is this: If the final component of a turn-constructional unit is problematic for the speaker in some fashion, then one option would be to initiate a repair. This, of course, specifically locates the problematic component as a trouble source—that is, self-repair draws attention to trouble. Initiation of self-repair can itself provide the occasion for a recipient to retrieve just the item that is being replaced by the repair as at Line 2 of Excerpt (9). Here, “S.A.E.” refers to a fraternity:

- (9) [Bonfire]
- 1 C: She uses all these big S.A.E., S.A.T. words
- 2 → P: ((laughs)) S.A.E. words
- 3 ((laughter from all))
- 4 C: S.A.T. words
- 5 ((pause))
- 6 You know what I mean?
- 7 K: Yeah . . .

List construction can provide a way to recast a possibly problematic utterance component as now having been merely the first item of a list.³ The next excerpt concerns the possibility of a famous actor purchasing an apartment house. The reference to “like one floor of it” at Line 2 of Excerpt (10) is treated as a somewhat faulty or imprecise reference, but a self-repair is not undertaken. Rather, a list is constructed that moves away from the initial reference:

- (10) [Student Tape:In Car]
- 1 A: yeah that would be a very wise investment
- 2 → C: If he's going to live in like one floor of it or
- 3 (.) a part of it or something=
- 4 J: =an why not?

The problematic reference can be retrospectively recast from being a single reference form that brings the turn to a possible completion to

now having been from its beginning merely the first item in a list where the design of the subsequent items accomplishes an embedded repair through the aegis of listing. This is accomplished by connecting items in a list that moves from definite to less definite to indefinite "place part" reference forms.

Both the establishment of a class of objects through list construction and the transformation of a single object into a list (accomplishing a "move" away from the initial item or embedded correction of that initial item through list construction) can be put to local situated use. I now turn to the description of one sequential context for list construction. Within that context I discuss list construction as a form of response to another's talk. First, I introduce the two-turn "collaborative turn" sequence and then examine how list construction provides special resources for producing a responding action within that sequence.

COLLABORATIVE TURN SEQUENCES

The utterances that make up turns at talk project within their course (roughly) what it will take to bring the current unit to completion (Sacks et al., 1974). On occasion, speakers produce turn-constructive units that project in their course that the current unit is in some way a preliminary component and that a second component will be produced to bring the turn-constructive unit to completion. For example, when a speaker begins a turn-constructive unit with an "if" component, a second "then" component can be foreshown. The turn unit is only properly complete on the completion of the "then" component. Sometimes, another party, on hearing the preliminary component of the compound turn-constructive unit, will produce a version of the anticipated final component:

- (11) [US]
 Rich: If you bring it intuh them
 Carol: ih don't cost yuh nothing

Many utterance types furnish the features of a compound turn-constructive unit and can be completed (Lerner, 1991). The occurrence of an anticipatory completion can initiate an action sequence—the collaborative turn sequence (Lerner, 1987)—whose second part is the acceptance or rejection of the turn-constructive unit completion proffered by another speaker:

- (12) [GL:FN]
 1 A: I think in giving me Tennessee twice,
 2 B: she forgot Colorado.
 3 → A: uh huh.

- (13) [Theodore]
 1 A: If you start watering,
 2 it [will get gree-
 3 B: [it will come back
 4 → A: y- yes uh huh

As in the above instances, the preliminary component of a compound turn-constructural unit provides a place for anticipatory completion. Anticipatory completion, on its occurrence, then makes the acceptance or rejection of the proffered completion relevant.

List construction can be used at two places within this sequence of actions. List construction can furnish the features of a preliminary compound turn-constructural unit that is completable (e.g., Excerpts (5), (6), and (8)). However, in the following discussion, I do *not* examine list construction as a site for anticipatory completion but, rather, the ways that list construction can be used at another position within this sequence—as a receipt in response to the completion of an earlier compound turn-constructural unit by another party.

Although simple acceptance and rejection do both occur in response to a proffered completion, rejection rarely occurs. Many rejected completions are produced as not serious attempts at anticipating the actual completion of the current utterance. List construction can provide the resources to respond to a proffered completion without explicitly rejecting it, yet without accepting it. List construction, then, can be seen as a receipt-slot alternative to acceptance and rejection, thus providing procedures that contribute to the preference for agreement in talk in interaction.

RESPONSIVE LIST CONSTRUCTION

Among the resources employed in such sequential contexts, list construction can be used as a responding action to anticipatory completion. This section describes how list construction can provide one receipt-slot alternative to simple (asserted) acceptance/rejection of the proffered completion.

I begin with an instance in which rejection occurs but a list is constructed in a way that “softens” that rejection. In Excerpt (14), Ken is illustrating how his grandmother treats her son (i.e., Ken’s father). The turn so far is the first part of a contrasting offer and the beginning of the contrastive offer formed as a quote. The form of the completion of the turn-constructural unit—a quote—and the type of action within that quote (an offer) is foreshown in the turn so far. At this point Louise produces her own completion—an *anticipatory* completion—for the turn-constructural unit in progress at Line 3:

- (15) [MDJ:student tape]
 1 M: No: I c'd think ya could (.) choose yer own name
 2 when yer-
 3 S: four.
 4 (0.3)
 5 → M: four, five, six=
 6 D: =No: b'cuz think about little kids,
 7 I mean they'd be naming themselves . . .

The construction of a list, incorporating the proffered completion as an item in a list rather than replacing the completion, as in Excerpt (14), can both propose an initial acceptance of that utterance and then transform that acceptance into something else (e.g., a partial or weak or limited acceptance). This can also be seen in the next instance:

- (16) [GTS]
 1 Ken: He said all the colored people uh walk-
 2 walk down the street and they may be
 3 all dressed up or somethin and these guys eh
 4 white- white guys'll come by with .hh
 5 Louise: mud.
 6 → Ken: mud, ink or anything and throw it at 'em

Here "mud" is repeated in receipt position by Ken. This alone could constitute an acceptance of "mud" as a proper completion to his just prior unfinished turn. Thus there is a momentary receipt of the prior utterance. But then "mud" becomes merely the first item of a list. Incorporation of another speaker's utterance into a list proposes that the proffered item is one among others rather than the single, correct (i.e., acceptable) item. List construction can here be seen as one receipt-slot alternative to both acceptance and rejection of the proffered completion. A second receipt-slot alternative, delayed completion, has been examined elsewhere (Lerner, 1989).

The incorporation of an utterance into a list is a procedure for accepting a candidate in a way that also displays that it is not the exclusive acceptable candidate, whereas a simple repeat in the receipt slot can be used to indicate acceptance of an anticipatory completion. In Excerpt (16), a repeat is produced. However, the continuation is constructed as a list, and therefore the repeat "mud" is seeable as having been the first member of the list. Because it is a list of the [item + item + generalized list completer] form, the sort of object being referenced is transformed from the items themselves into the class to which the first two items belong. (One might think of the generalized list completer as a *generalizing* list completer.) In this way, the grounds on which the anticipatory completion is accepted is changed from an acceptance of "mud" to an acceptance of the class of objects (throwable objects?) to which "mud" belongs. It accomplishes a move away from acceptance, without outright rejection of the candidate.

APPLYING CONVERSATIONAL STRUCTURE TO THE ANALYSIS OF A SINGLE CASE

In this section, list construction as an analytic resource is brought to bear in the explication of a single utterance within its local sequential context. I now return to the excerpt that was described at the beginning of this report and examine how responsive list construction is put to work in that instance, redisplayed as Excerpt (17), at the intersection of two locally relevant sequential and interactional contingencies: word search organization and overlap management. Because of this intersection there are concurrently relevant next actions: first, the retrieval from overlap of another's utterance, and second, because that utterance was produced within a word search, its status as an acceptable candidate ought also to be addressed:

- (17) [GTS]
- | | | |
|---|--------|--|
| 1 | Dan: | well I <u>do</u> know last week that uh <u>Al</u> was certainly very |
| 2 | | (0.6) |
| 3 | Roger: | pi[ssed off |
| 4 | Dan: | [upset, 'n pissed off, 'n angry en w'z bout ready tuh fi:ght |
| 5 | | uh with Ken |

List construction can be used as an overlap management device. It provides a way to extend an utterance that does not mark the extension as competitive. In this instance, "upset," as a characterization of how Al was feeling last week, could stand as a possible completion of the turn in progress. One feature of list organization exploited here is that a single, in itself sufficient, person characterization term can be turned into having been a first term rather than the only term and thus not an addition to an overlapped utterance but merely its natural continuation. In addition, because list construction provides for the possibility of multiple items (i.e., its three-partedness) it can be used to assimilate versions of both speakers' overlapping utterances. List construction can be used in receipt position, in effect, to retrieve both speakers' utterances from overlap.⁴

The list construction format is used here to acknowledge the overlapped completion while not fully endorsing it. Although the second and third items seem to be different formulations of the same reference, both of which are upgrades of the original characterization ("upset"), they are produced in a way (placing conjunctions between the items) that proposes that they are in fact different (though similar) attributes. The conjunctive list format (X and Y and Z) allows a shift to "angry" rather than a substitution of "angry" for "pissed off." In this way, the candidate is not rejected but is also not allowed to stand alone as an acceptable characterization of what was projected to follow "very."

As in Excerpt (16), the construction of a list in Excerpt (17) provides a way of acknowledging a candidate. The turn is extended by transforming the possibly final word of the turn-constructive unit into the first item in a list. Dan incorporates the overlapped utterance as the next item in the list. By producing the acknowledgment as a part of a list, the speaker can move away from the acceptance of the candidate as the completion of the source turn in progress.

These considerations describe the technical resources needed for a solution to a local interactional problem. In Excerpt (17), Dan is doing a delicate characterization. It is marked as such. The evaluation of Al's emotional state is not produced in its serially adjacent place. That is, the search for the "just right" word reveals the characterization as delicate. (Also, he chooses the careful term "upset.") One issue seems to be how to refer to the way one of the participants was feeling at the group's last meeting. Roger is proposing what might be seen for this group to be distinctly a teenager's colloquial version (see Sacks, 1979), whereas Dan seems to be proposing with "upset" an adult/therapist's "careful" version.

Dan is doing "therapist's talk," and is displayedly trying to produce a careful characterization, yet one part of therapist's talk seems to be to acknowledge the talk of the participants. This produces a problem—a member's problem. How can Dan both acknowledge Roger's blunt remark and still continue to produce a delicate characterization of Al's feelings? In other words, how can he continue to talk as a therapist while at the same time displaying empathy with his clients? The use of a list format in the receipt slot provides a methodic solution. Its use allows a shift from, but not abandonment of, "upset" as well as allowing an acknowledgment of Roger's utterance. After acknowledging "pissed off," Dan produces the third item ("angry"). This retains the upgrade of "pissed off" while returning to the adult/therapist register of "upset."

A CONCLUDING REMARK

This report has described some of the practical procedures available to participants in conversational interaction. I have not attempted to explain why each particular party produced a particular action. Rather, I have attempted to locate the social-sequential circumstances that provide the occasion for specifiable actions and then have described how the social-syntactic resource of list construction can be used on those occasions. Finally, I have applied those analytic resources to a single utterance used on a particular occasion of talk in interaction so as to shed light on an actual, naturally occurring event at a level of detail at which it was organized by the participants.

NOTES

1. My analysis of this excerpt emerged from my dissertation research on collaborative turn sequences (Lerner, 1987) and particularly on the various ways in which participants acknowledge a proffered turn unit completion by another speaker. As it turned out, Jefferson (1990) had already produced an analysis of this excerpt as part of her pioneering work on list construction. This situation is one consequence of working from a common corpus of materials. I view my analysis of "list receipts" of coparticipant completion as a confirmation of Jefferson's analysis from a converging line of work. In this report, I begin with Jefferson's work on list construction, developing some of her findings in ways that are relevant to the concerns of this report. I then introduce collaborative turn sequences and show how responsive list construction can be used in the "receipt slot" of these sequences.

2. Similarly, a three-part list seems to be all that is needed to establish a class contrast (as compared to an item contrast):

- [GTS]
 Ken: Maybe he can't fix a dune buggy
 maybe maybe he can't find one end
 of a screwdriver from another
 (.)
 Roger: but he's Joe American.

The first two items establish the dimension or class of differentness with which the third item is contrasted.

3. Jefferson (1987), in a discussion of exposed and embedded correction, predicted that list construction could be used to do embedded self-correction.

4. Ordinarily, speakers retrieve only their own overlapped talk, or they retrieve only the talk of the other speaker:

- [GTS:1]
 Roger: Yeah. Yeah that's [right
 Ken: [And y-you think I really
 got pleasure out of getting uh well
 I- getti[ng in that debate?
 Louise: [stomped on.
 Ken: Cause that's what it ended up to be, a big debate.
 [Gerald]
 R: if you don't pu things on yer calendar
 (.)
 [(forget it)]
 D: [yer outta luck.] yeah(p). f₀:getit

In the first instance, Ken produces his postoverlap retrieval as a continuation ("Cause") in an attempt to sequentially delete Louise's utterance. In the second instance, D produces a receipt token ("yeah(p)."), which, when followed by a repeat of R's overlapped talk, sequentially deletes his own completion attempt ("yer outta luck."). List structure provides the possibility of retrieving both.

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