Observations on features of a research interview

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Abstract

This paper looks at some constitutive features of interviews and the presentation of 'findings' from interviews. A set of open-ended interviews was conducted after the bombing of Manchester city-centre, with residents, people who worked in the city centre, and members of the emergency services who had attended the scene. Regardless of the 'substantive' topic of inquiry, a naturalistic approach to the structures of talk within these interviews makes available collaborative linguistic phenomena produced by interviewer and interviewees. These routine practices included designing talk for a specific interlocutor, the use of referents or indexical expressions, the deployment of membership categories and the telling of stories. As a single case analysis, a sequence of talk from one interview is used to highlight the specificity of these ordinary features.

Key words: acknowledgement tokens, Manchester bombing, Membership Categorization Analysis, ownership, recipient design, stories.

Resumo

Este artigo examina algumas das características constitutivas de entrevistas e da apresentação de "achados" a partir de entrevistas. Um conjunto de entrevistas abertas foram conduzidas após o ataque a bomba no centro de Manchester com residentes da área, pessoas que trabalhavam no centro da cidade e membros dos serviços de emergência que se fizeram presentes no local. Independentemente do tema "substantivo" das perguntas, um enfoque naturalista das estruturas de discurso dentro dessas entrevistas disponibiliza fenômenos lingüísticos colaborativos produzidos pelo entrevistador e pelo entrevistado. Essas práticas rotineiras incluíam a projeção do discurso para um interlocutor específico, o uso de referentes ou expressões de indexação, a distribuição em categorias de membros e a narração de histórias. Como análise de um único caso, uma seqüência de conversação tomada de uma entrevista é usada para salientar a especificidade dessas características ordinárias.

Palavras-chave: sinais de reconhecimento, ataque à bomba em Manchester, Análise de Categorização de Membros, assunção, projeto de receptores, histórias.

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Introduction

In this paper I shall look at interviews as a sociological research method, and in particular some practices that constitute the 'interactional bedrock' of interviews. Considerations of interviews, as collaborative achievements, are made in terms of membership categorisation and 'methodological irony'. Crudely stated, methodological irony occurs when, rather than explicating members' versions, the analyst's account traduces members' orientations to their social world (Anderson and Sharrock, 1983; Carlin, 2002; Watson, 1998a). I discuss some under-reported features of interviews as 'conduits' for social inquiries, which the topicalising of formal properties of talk makes available for study. These features may be enumerated as the use of membership categories (by both the interviewee and interviewer); how the categorisation of the interviewer by the interviewee (and *vice versa*) may affect the interview itself; interviews and the reporting of interviews (or their 'data', their purported products) as methodologically ironic processes; the interview as a speech-exchange system; recipiency and acknowledgments of recipiency (e.g. 'acknowledgment tokens'); stories in conversation and the features of stories in interview settings. In this paper I have included extracts from transcribed renderings of talk in interviews, which are 'ostensibly about' the city-centre bombing of Manchester, England, in 1996[2]. As this paper on the linguistic constitution of interviews as research practices shows, the designation of these interviews as interviews-about-the-Manchester-bombing is problematic.

The *gestalt* switch involved in the study of formal structures in the interviews, *how* people talk about the bomb (in this particular vehicle, the interview), elides the pitfalls inherent in attempts to uncover or conceive of an interview's 'products' as 'bona fide "data"' (Hester and Francis, 1994, p. 676). They continue, 'Particular interviews are not representatives, they are just local, here and now, occurrences' (Hester and Francis, 1994, p. 679). Rather than selectively reprinting extended tracts of interview 'data' I shall, for methodological purposes, confine the analysis to a particular interview from the corpus of interviews taken during the research. A bloc of talk from an interview is discussed in terms of a 'single case' (Schegloff, 1988), which demonstrates how ordinary, routine phenomena are interactional achievements. This emphasises that the concerns of this paper are not with the bombing of Manchester but with ordinary, routine phenomena occasioned in interview environments that are frequently glossed over and used as resources in the analysis of interviews. So even before locating an interview within a corpus

of interviews, or relating interview 'data' to a predetermined research problem, a range of interview-specific phenomena are available for rigorous analysis in their own right. Thus, 'ethnographic' analysis of the corpus of interviews constitutes a separate project, which is not pursued in this paper.

The use of categories and referents

That interviews somehow constitute 'conduits' is a problematic approach to research practices, one that fails to account for the thoroughly linguistic nature of social life, *including* sociological research practices. Sociological research interviews are encounters in which the interviewer attempts to elicit information from an interviewee, but it should not be forgotten that the elicitation, provision and receipt of information within interview settings are natural language activities.

> To be sure, we must abandon the entire notion of the interview as a conduit to a separately-conceived object, as a 'window on the world', however clear or opaque (Watson, 1998b, p. 6).

This is at the heart of sociological inquiries, and ushers in the distinction between topic and resource (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1971). When we look at an 'interview datum', is this 'datum' actually conceived as being 'of' or 'about' something? Is it a datum which can be used in the service of a 'substantive'[3] topic, i.e. used as a resource, or is it instead a datum in and of itself, i.e. to be approached and used as a topic? As Watson goes on to say,

> Instead, then, of treating the interview as a more or less corrigible channel to, or perspective on [topics] conceived as independent, free-standing objects […] treat them as actively constituted by and through the interview and as inseparable from the interactional vehicles through which the interview is conducted (Watson, 1998b, p. 6-7).

So Watson (1998b) suggests that sociologists should not see the products or 'textual outcomes' of interviews as being data 'about' something. In this approach to interviews the researcher is enjoined 'to treat the interview data as displays of membership categorisation work by interviewees as well as interviewer' (Baker, 1997, p. 137).

The 'rectilinear' presentation of transcripts in this paper preserves the interactional, collaborative features of the 'interviews', and makes available the use of membership categories by myself, as 'interviewer', and 'interviewees'. However, care must be taken with the provision of *a priori*

[2] Interviews were conducted for an ethnographic project. Inquiries about the bomb were conducted twelve months after the explosion.
[3] On the status of 'substantive' issues, see Watson and Sharrock (1991).

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categories by the transcriber. The extracts from the interview transcript presented in this paper and the discussions of the extracts identify the speaker as 'the Police Chief'. The provision of categorial identities is problematic in that it works to provide background resources for the interpretation of turns at talk. The provision of categorial identities is difficult to overcome; yet it may be reasoned through careful consideration of transcription practices. A possible form of presentation of transcripts is more anonymous, that is, less categorially-implicative, by identifying my questions/comments only. Nevertheless, the categorial identification would remain a problematic feature of the discussions of the transcripts.

Another difficulty arises in regarding (and presenting) people as one-dimensional, e.g. the Police Chief as solely a police chief. It would be erroneous to suggest that respondents' orientations to Manchester and the bombing of the city-centre are somehow 'overridden' by their official or professional identities. Although interviewees worked in the city, some were residents of Manchester too. The bomb also had implications for attention to professional duties. Other informants discuss how the bomb—and the cordon set up after the explosion—affected people both in physically getting to work and in moving between their workplaces. Without suggesting the existence of a simple dualism in identity-categories (Schenkein, 1978a), I shall refer to 'professional' and 'personal' identities.

In reporting interviews, analysts could suggest, but cannot stipulate, that interviewees are oriented to responding in their 'professional' capacity; whether the interviewee is displaying 'professional' alignments to the event. That is, an interviewee responding *qua* 'how any member of their category would respond'. So, for example, in the interview reported here does (and if at all, to what extent) the Police Chief talk about the bomb 'on behalf of' other police chiefs[4]; had I spoken to another police chief, would I have had the same (or similar) responses? A case of this is exhibited in the following extract:[5]

> PC: erm it was low flying and of course (.) that the use of megaphones on the street erm (.) and the other methods it's a question of clearing people away °get them° as far away as possible (.) and erm I think with, with with these type of events with any (.) major disaster (.) erm I think any police officer will tell you this (.) it doesn't matter how good your plans are, you will have an initial phase of chaos (.) where everybody is trying to come to terms with what's happened (.) erm and deal with it erm. One of the important (.) things within that sort of chaos phase (.) is if you like the (.) the confidence and training of police officers, who will not they won't wait to be told what to do

The Police Chief's utterance 'I think any police officer will tell you this' is not to be taken as representative of similar *types* of utterance, i.e. this is not being mooted as a theme for analysis. It is an illustrative case of a difficulty we face as analysts in approaching interview 'data' *qua* interviews, and the category-membership of interviewer and interviewee. In this utterance the police chief makes an explicit (yet downgraded) claim to inform the interviewer as an incumbent of a particular category: if the interviewee had been another member of that category the interviewer would receive the same information. Furthermore, not just 'another' police chief but *any* police officer would display such alignment, would respond in this manner: that is, this information would be supplied by a member of the police regardless of their rank.

The Police Chief does, then, appeal to professionalism in the sense that 'any police officer will tell you', or would be able to tell the same thing. In the following extract, the police chief explains that the police officer is a witness to sights that lay persons may not encounter, and how the stories of these sights are part of a 'police culture'.

1. PC: Mind if I smoke?

2. AC: Please go ahead. ((cigarette lighter flipping)) This is a guess, and then you'll have to, have to correct me, I guess it would have been the central topic of conversation here for

3. PC: A long time, a long time. Erm (.) we we see so many things you know, policing is a unique job, um, no day is the same, um, you see all sorts of strange and wonderful things, um, which are sort of part of the police mythology. The, the anecdotes people can tell about the human race are quite startling. Um (.) I can remember going into an alcoholic's house, some years ago, and this alcoholic drank (.) cans of Carling (.) um Special Brew, and every time she drunk one she threw the empty can on the floor. And when she finally died, the whole ground floor of that house was eighteen inches deep in, with empty cans.

4. AC: °Good grief.°

5. PC: Startling! But it's human!

6. AC: Hmm.

7. PC: Erm, just this last weekend we had a man attempt suicide. Um, now a popular method, in a car putting a hose in and dying from the fumes. Well this man, put a new twist on this. He cut his wrists, then he put the hose into his car, and then he started driving round the city.

8. AC: °((laugh))°

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[4] The use of capitals designates the individual respondent to whom I refer. This procedure follows Sacks (1972), who capitalised the word Member to designate individual members as opposed to courses of action.

[5] See Appendix for transcript notation.

9. PC: Yeah! So again, it's <u>sad</u> but it's it's it's part of, part of policing you know. Erm, there are always these strange and wonderful things that you see. Erm, but of course the bombing was something else. That was a <u>huge</u> event, which a lot of officers became involved in, um, after the event, so erm they've all got their memories of it. You know I've got (.) some <u>won</u>derful memories of it which, um, I can relate to people with a great deal of humour. Um (.) I can remember being down on the cordon one evening. A very <u>dapper</u>, well dressed gentleman came up to me and he said um

10. AC: °((laughing))°
:
:   [tells story]
:

11. PC: ((laugh)) But as I say you know there are these there are these memories and everybody involved will have their own personal memories of what was an incredible event.

12. AC: Hmm.

13. PC: So, erm, it's still it's it's it's part of the culture here now.

This is immediately reminiscent of the 'occupational wisdom' and 'streetcraft' of traffic wardens (Richman, 1983, p. 111 ff.): a 'mythology' had been established, with story-telling sessions at the end of each day ('post-5.00p.m.') among the traffic wardens, where (sometimes possibly apocryphal) tales of 'street administration' were told to each other. However, rather than bringing a corpus of sociological material for thematic analysis, I shall consider this extract in its own right. This is a procedure following Sharrock and Anderson (1987, p. 247), who, outlining the approach to transcripts in Conversation Analysis, say 'Each transcript is inspected for what it contains, what its structures are, and how its features can be made visible and analysable'.

An interesting feature of this extract, in illustrating the professional domain, is how the Police Chief establishes this domain, which is categorially-determined. He achieves this through the use of reference terms, or referents. Ordinary referents provide a linguistic basis to suggest that there is an overlap between the professional and personal realms of experience. (This overlap is only part of the problem of interviews and their analysis.) The uses of these referent terms are not isolated events. Consider, at the beginning of the extract, the Police Chief's demarcation of incumbents in the following bloc of utterances:

> PC: Erm (.) we we see so many things you know, policing is a unique job, um, no day is the same, um, you see all sorts of strange and wonderful things, um, which are sort of part of the police mythology.

'We', (as in '*we* see so many things' and, in the first extract, 'just this last weekend *we* had a man attempt suicide') as used

by the Police Chief, refers to members of the Police Force. Likewise 'you' is used as a referent to members of the Police Force ('*you* see all sorts of strange and wonderful things', 'there are always these strange and wonderful things that *you* see'). The Police Chief can refer to an all-inclusive 'anyone' in the manner which a potential suicide might refer to there being 'no-one' to approach about their difficulties (Sacks, 1967). His utterance 'the anecdotes *people* can tell about the *human race* are quite startling' shows how, in categorial terms, he is able to collect and refer to members of the Police Force as 'people' and non-members of the Police Force as 'the human race.'

The use of reference terms or 'indexical expressions' (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970) is an important feature of interviews for social inquiry. This feature can be seen in the *selection* of reference terms by this interviewee, the Police Chief. Consider the use of a number of other potential reference terms: for example, rather than 'we', the Police Chief could have referred to WPC Mills and PC Marshall. The selection of hypothetical but categorially-implicative reference terms (we and you, people) is predicated on the interviewee's assessment or inference of the state of knowledge of the interviewer. That is, the interviewee tailors responses to the interviewer's state of knowledge. This assessment and accommodation of an interlocutor's state of knowledge is known as 'recipient design' (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979, p. 16). The design features of talk in a different 'form' of setting is encapsulated thus:

> When we talk with someone else about the world, we take into account who the other is, what that other person could be presumed to know, 'where' that other is in relation to ourself in the world we talk about (Baker, 1982, p. 109).

The Police Chief *could* have selected WPC Mills and PC Marshall as 'recognitionals', which are defined as

> such reference forms as invite and allows a recipient to find, from some 'this-referrer's-use-of-a-reference-form' on some 'this-occasion-for-use', who, that recipient knows, is being referred to (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979, p. 17).

Quite apart from any considerations of anonymity, not using people's names, the Police Chief (correctly) inferred that the interviewer would not recognise (the hypothetical) WPC Mills and PC Marshall. As Sacks and Schegloff (1979) go on to say, the use of recognitionals is contingent upon the case that 'recipient may be supposed to know the one being referred to'. The Police Chief designed his reference terms accordingly, and in terms of the conversational *preference* for minimal reference: 'nonrecognitional forms (and indeed minimised recognitional forms – e.g. 'someone') are available to any speaker for any recipient about any referent' (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979, p. 17).

Categories, referents and 'ownership'

Within the interviews, and taking the Police Chief as the example for single case analysis, there are 'professional' as well as 'personal' aspects or versions of accounts. The authorisation of the professional account is coincident with the personal account, whereby the Police Chief moves from the 'we' referent to 'I' ('*I* can remember'), introducing a personal-professional (or personal-*as*-professional) contour to his account.

In making moves between talking about the bomb from personal and professional experience, a respondent 'owns' the personal experience. By this metaphorical use of 'ownership' (Sharrock, 1974, p. 52) I mean to imply that the personal testimony of personal experience provided to an interviewer is incontrovertible, in the sense that the respondent is in possession of the authoritative version of events from their own standpoint. We can refer to the incontrovertibility and methodological irony in analysts' first-hand formulations as the 'Mildred Pierce phenomenon'[6]—the assertion that the analyst's account is the only account worthy of consideration. This is an analogous case, except that reporting procedures, which regard members' first-hand formulations as controvertible or as being somehow deficient, involve a methodological irony. This culturally-methodic feature of authorising accounts – 'I was there and you weren't' – is also discussed by Watson (1990, p. 270-271). As Watson goes on to say, however, the '"*experience-licensed*" nature of the claims' is not the necessary commonsense criterion of veracity in some institutional contexts (see the discussion of stories, below).

Here I am not invoking a methodologically ironic notion of epistemological standpoints apropos of homogenous analytic categories, e.g. race, gender, class. As an analyst I do not have the authority to redefine words with pre-existing meanings (Rose, 1960; 1962). Instead I refer to members' standpoints as evidenced by domains of professional expertise, e.g. as a police chief, and as witnesses of an event. Although on occasion, and *in situ*, it may provide a useful interviewing technique – 'playing Devil's advocate' – the interviewer is not in a position to subvert this personal standpoint; analytically, the *post hoc* subversion of accounts introduces a level of methodological irony. A methodologically non-ironic study could be produced comparing the versions of events, and showing how the authors of the collection themselves ironicise versions through the selectivity and co-categorisation of extracts. Importantly, the reader does not know, and has no means of knowing, whether the extracts are decontextualised or remain properly situated within the context of their production/occurrence.

Displaying recipiency: The interviewer in the interview

> Although the participation of the speaker in a turn is apparent, the role of the hearer has not received much attention (Goodwin, 1989, p. 91).

Following Rose's advice on talking with people for purposes of worldly inquiries,[7] I attempted to minimise the interference or direction I give to the talk. In preserving the turn-by-turn character of the talk in interviews, however, it is observable that I do produce talk[8].

Within news interviews it is incumbent upon the interviewer to ask questions of the interviewee. Over the last decade a growing corpus of literature which focuses on news interviews as distinctive speech-exchange systems has proliferated (Carlin and Slack, 2001). Within the sociological interview, it is incumbent upon the interviewer to ascertain information from the interviewee. It is crucial to the 'internal validity' of the interview setting that the talk is preserved *in toto*, to account for the interaction which constitutes the interview.

By 'internal validity' I do not refer to issues of 'validity' and 'reliability' but to the 'once only' and 'first time through' (Garfinkel *et al.*, 1981, p. 132) character of interviews, and the integrity of representations. The preservation of the internal validity of the interview means complete transcription of the interviewee's talk, rather than abbreviated renderings, and consequentially methodologically ironic presentations of interviewee's responses; it is also essential to preserve the interviewer's contributions in an equally exhaustive manner. This presupposes a recording enterprise that preserves as much of the setting's phenomena as possible, including 'pre-interview' phenomena. This recording enterprise captures features which are hitherto not considered important features of sociological study. For example,

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[Atkinson, Cuff and Lee]
1.       ((general background noise))
2.   C:[1]   Right–e:r–
3.       ((general background noise))
4.       ((pause ca. 4.00)) ((general background noise))
5.   C:   –Are we ready to go again now?
6.       ((general background noise))
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[6] 'Mildred Pierce' was a character in a short story by William S. Burroughs' (1974), the journalist who is the eye-witness to events. When the news-link reaches her, she assures the anchor and her listeners that 'I was there, I saw it all'.[7] Among Rose's rules for talking with people, 'Let [informant] decide what he wants to say. Say only: 'Tell me about that.' Don't worry about *yourself*. Don't talk beyond telling *the tape* who you are, when and where, and get [informant] to give *any* name.' (Edward Rose, personal communication 21 July 1997; emphasis supplied.)

[8] Within the interviews for this project I deliberately employed, as an information-elicitation technique, what has been formulated as 'Rose's gloss' (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970, p. 365-366).

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7.        ((pause ca. 3.00)) ((general background noise))
8.   R:   Yes
9.        ((general background noise))
10.  C:   Good, Ray's ready – e:r can I just mention um . . just–
11.       just mention one more thing before I go round the table
12.       and then I really have got a batch of (other points).
13.       Ray has – ((background noise ceases))
14.  C:   –just reminded me might as well bring this one up
          as well
15.  C:   just to mention it . . .
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The 'background noise' (lines 1, 3-4, 6-7, 9, 13) that Atkinson *et al.* (1978, p. 135) refer to is the noise of a coffee-break within a meeting, with its attendant clinking of crockery and the production of conversations by different cohorts of members within the same interactional setting. They found that an utterance – 'Right–e:r–' (line 2) – was audible above 'background noise', therefore available for transcription, and oriented to by participants in the setting, i.e. it was interactionally significant. This utterance, produced within a meeting by an incumbent of the category 'chair of meeting' – so categorised by the hearers of this utterance as being relevant to them – is an 'attention-attractor' (1978, p. 137). Atkinson *et al.* demonstrate how mundane actions, which may not be regarded as the 'business' of a meeting, are both constitutive of meetings and analysable as topics in their own right. Similarly, rigorous transcription of the interviewer's utterances ensures that the 'context of elicitation' of interviewee's utterances is available for scrutiny, rather than being edited or systematically 'screened out' of the final version.

Interviews are interactional encounters, between the interviewer and interviewee(s). As such, the interviewer has to display recipiency of talk within the interaction. A task of the interviewer is then to display recipiency throughout the interview without, or at least minimising, the extent of direction and ratification of responses. By 'direction and ratification' I am suggesting the influence of the interviewer on the trajectory of interviewee's turns, through the conversational activities of asking questions; and by providing 'continuers' or 'acknowledgment tokens' – what Schegloff (1972, p. 404) refers to as 'assent terms' – which encourage a particular trajectory at the expense of another possible trajectory of talk. Examples of acknowledgment tokens include 'yeah', 'mm-hm', and 'uh-huh'.

In the interview presented in this paper, it is visible that I produce such acknowledgment tokens as, *inter alia*, 'right', 'aha', 'mmm', 'hmm', a questioning 'hmm?', 'hm' and the quieter "°hm°". Maynard (1980, p. 270) refers to these productional particulars as solicits because they 'demonstrate recipient attention and invite further related talk.' Watson (1998b, p. 14) notes that the term 'continuer' is problematic because this description does not attend the instance-by-instance work, i.e. the haecceity of such an utterance: an utterance 'achieves the status of 'continuer' by its active employment as a member of the "yes"/"no" set'.

Jefferson (1993a) observes that acknowledgment tokens are not necessarily coterminous, or interchangeable. Her observation is based upon empirical data of therapy talk, which suggest that different forms of acknowledgment token accomplish different interactional work. Fitted together with her paper on 'transcriptional stereotyping' (Jefferson, 1996), Jefferson's observations on pronunciational particulars and acknowledgment tokens encourage analysts to transcribe on an 'instance-by-instance' basis (Jefferson, 1996, p. 162). This more careful procedure does not traduce members' productions, which would have been a source of methodological irony; and it preserves the phenomenological intactness of interactional settings.

Elsewhere, Jefferson (1993b, p. 11) notes how some acknowledgment tokens may be 'thoroughly disattentive' to the ensuing talk, however. Local perturbations in sequences of talk can be caused by what may be referred to as 'inappropriate responses', i.e. the tying of an apparently disjunctive utterance to a prior utterance.[9] A counsellor's 'inappropriate response' may be due to a motivated pursuing of information analogous to a 'determinate structure' of questions (Smith, 1974). That the recipient's responses may be 'thoroughly misfitted' (Jefferson, 1993b) to talk is illustrated by the following extract[10] from parenthood-counselling sessions in a penal institution:

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[57-5]
     1    CR1   so what about you
     2          what can you remember about your childhood
     3    CD3   erm
     4          ((pause))
     5          I didn't used to like sitting in the car outside
                the pub
     6          while my mum and dad were in there
                getting pissed
     7    CR1   ah right
 →   8          that that's a really good one isn't it
     9          so=
    10    CD1   ((laugh))
                [
    11    CD2   ((laugh))
                [
    12    CD3   ((smile))
    13    CR1   =we could say
    14          would you be doing that with yours
    15    CD3   no well I don't drink anyway
    16    CR1   right
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9   This is a matter for conversationalists, not analysts, to decide. For example, my *sotto voce* response to a story of a suicide (line 8) in the extract above can, retrospectively, be seen as an 'inappropriate' response but the 'inappropriate' nature of a turn is to be judged by how the interlocutor treats it, e.g. as surprise.

10 This sequence of talk is transcribed from a video-recorded training session for young fathers, run by a national charity in England. I am grateful to all participants for permission to use these recordings for academic purposes, and for making them available to me. For reasons of confidentiality, I shall not discuss the source or context of these recordings further.

In this extract, CR1 is following an intuitively motivated line of enquiry that group-members' childhood experiences are determining factors in their being sentenced to prison. CR1's response (lines 7-9) to CD3's disclosure (lines 5-6) is regarded by members to be inappropriate, i.e. CR1 does not attend to the disclosure *per se* but how it acts as an 'indexical particular' which supports her suggested 'underlying pattern'. Members of the group display that they interpret CR1's response to CD3's disclosure as inappropriate in their collaborative disengagement (lines 10-12). As the term 'perturbation' suggests, the situated event is transitory and treated by members as a 'side sequence' (Jefferson, 1972), which allows talk to resume, rather than a terminal exchange.

Some continuers, e.g. 'yes', 'right', or 'great', have the potential to display affiliation with particular responses. Within the context of the interview setting, continuers may suggest the interviewer's agreement with the interviewee, which may be problematic not just in terms of the integrity of the inquiry but could also have ethical or political ramifications. (The interviewer could unwittingly find themselves condoning or endorsing particular positions, for example.) In order to 'limit the collusion' with talk as it is produced, the interviewer may use more 'neutral' information-elicitation techniques. That is, to use such tokens of recipiency, which do not, in themselves, affiliate or disaffiliate the interviewer from the ongoing talk.

'Stories' and Story-Formats: Interview Activities as Linguistic Activities

In this section I show the relevance of stories to research interviews. Harvey Sacks identifies two different 'types' of stories in conversation: volunteered, i.e. teller-initiated stories; and invited, i.e. recipient-initiated stories. For Sacks, stories typically take more than one utterance to do. Since this is the case, the turn-taking system has to be suspended by the interlocutors so that the storyteller is able (potentially, at least) to complete the story. This can be a practical problem in a sociological interview, which largely occurs on a question-answer basis.

Another formal speech-exchange system is the murder interrogation. Why should we look at murder interrogations when considering sociological interviews? If this seems a somewhat unrelated topic, I shall show how features of murder interrogations may inform and elaborate our considerations of interviews.

As Watson (1979, 1990) shows, stories (blocs of talk of more than one utterance) are told during murder interrogations. The parties to the murder interrogation have certain rights and responsibilities: the suspect's rights are enshrined in the Miranda-Escobedo ruling; and police officer's rights and responsibilities are 'mandated by' the pre-allocation of turns in murder interrogations, whereby the police officer asks questions and may interrupt the suspect[11]. Although the police officer has these rights, if the suspect is telling a story the police officer cedes the 'floor' and remains silent, refraining from asking questions.

This may seem counter-intuitive, that the police officer provides conversational 'space' for the suspect to tell a story. However, it is important for the admissibility of confessions in court that the suspect does more that make a claim to have committed the crime. That the suspect makes a claim, e.g. 'I did it', is unsatisfactory for the legal requirements of confessions. In the murder interrogation as a formal speech-exchange system it is not enough to claim responsibility, to say 'I did it', nor is it enough to authorize any claim to responsibility, to say 'I was there and you weren't'[12]. The suspect has to *display* that they committed the crime, and such displays are commonly exhibited during stories. The 'incriminating' story is one that is conjunctive with or 'fits' the evidence, and its conjuncture is adjudged by the police officer. The police officer uses the Documentary Method of Interpretation in their assessment of the suspect's confession, which enables them to

> assemble coherence to a set of particular documentary evidences [i.e. the police officer's knowledge about the facts of the crime and the suspect's displays of knowledge about the facts of the crime] by reference to an underlying pattern [i.e. the claim to responsibility for the crime] (Watson 1990, p. 271; my brackets).

Watson's analyses of murder interrogations point up a feature of stories which has relevance to our considerations of the sociological interview, namely a distinction between teller-initiated, i.e. 'volunteered' stories and recipient-initiated, i.e. 'invited' stories. Typically the volunteered story opens with an adjacency pair, a 'story preface' of the following structure:

> A: I saw something terrible in college today
> B: Oh really?
> A: This girl was walking in front of me
>   when she fell down the MacRobert steps…
>   [story continues]

In the first pair part, A offers to tell a story. In the second pair part, B gives or declines permission to tell the story; whereupon the second pair part determines the trajectory of the story (whether it is told or not). (This structure is observable

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[11] Whilst these are 'legal' responsibilities, 'proper' responses to invitations to tell stories are recognised by members to be displayed in various settings and upon various topics, e.g. marriage breakdown (Cuff and Francis, 1978, p. 114).

[12] The 'Mildred Pierce phenomenon' again (see note 6).

in Rodriguez and Ryave's (1992) study of secret-telling encounters.) Prospective teller has to give the 'floor' away in order to get permission to tell the story. The opening format of the volunteered story can be seen in this extract from the telling of a joke (Sacks, 1974, p. 338):

1. KEN: You wanna hear muh-eh my sister told me a
            story
2.   last night
3. ROGER: I don't wanna hear it. But if you must,
            (1.0)

Sacks' extract, rather than my fictional example[13], shows the adjacency pair format of the story preface: Ken offers to tell a story; the recipient, Roger, gives Ken permission to tell the story, whereupon Ken has conversational 'space' to proceed. That is, when Roger or any recipient accedes to the speaker's volunteering to tell a story, the speaker may take a long bloc of talk without major interruption from the recipient; i.e. there is a temporary suspension of the turn-taking system. Stories are, therefore, collaborative productions in that the recipient agrees to listen (or at least agrees not to interrupt). The collaborative nature of story production is further exhibited by the story preface, which acts as a set of instructions for recipients to hear the ensuing talk, whilst, at the same time, acting as a set of constraints for the teller.

As an illustration of recipient instructions, this next extract takes place within a 'round' of jokes in the hot-rodders session. In that stories are fitted to each other – a story can be followed by a 'second story', and such story selection and story-telling may proceed indefinitely – Al infers from Ken's opening sequence that the story is a joke. Knowing only that Ken's sister is twelve years old informs Al's subsequent conversational actions:

> [Al] uses the mentioning of the source [of the joke] to employ what he knows about the sister, that she is twelve years old, to occasion telling a joke which can be delivered as a guess by being the sort of joke such persons tell (Sacks, 1974, p. 344).

So again we are looking at category-membership[14]. As such, before Ken is able to proceed with the story, Al (lines 4-5) guesses at the joke Ken's sister might have told:

4. AL: What's purple an' an island. Grape — Britain.
5.   That's what iz sis//ter —
6. KEN: No. To stun me she says uh there was these three
7.   girls an' they just got married?

Ken's corrective of Al's candidate 'type' of joke at line 6 instructs the recipients that the type of joke is not one which might be associated with the category 'twelve year old girls' and is fitted to the jokes in the round. Al's guess 'reoccasions the originally intended telling' (Sacks, 1974, p. 344), and where the fit of the story, i.e. as a 'dirty' joke is provided for by Ken's utterance 'No. To stun me she says …' (line 6). Ken's utterance acts as an instruction for hearing the story.

In the story-preface above, 'I saw something terrible in college today', A is providing a set of instructions to B: that if B accepts A's request to tell this story, the story contains 'something terrible'[15]. It also works to constrain A to produce a story that contains 'something terrible'. One feature of stories in ordinary conversation is that the recipient must listen to the story until 'something terrible' is produced; and the story is not completed until 'something terrible' is produced. In this sense, the story preface sets the relevance for the telling and for the hearing of the story. The production of the reason for the story, e.g. 'something terrible', indicates the imminent closing of the story to the recipient, who typically produces a 'story appreciation utterance'. Story appreciation utterances acknowledge that the story has finished, and confirm to the teller that the recipient has understood the story as it was intended, e.g. as a story about 'something terrible' rather than a story about 'something hilarious'.[16] The story appreciation utterance also provides for the telling of second stories, i.e. stories that have features in common with the first. If the first story is about 'something terrible' the second story is about 'something terrible'. Second stories also display the understanding of the first story. If the first story is about 'something terrible' and the recipient of the first story tells a second story which is about 'something hilarious', then the teller of the first story has warrant to infer that the teller of the second story failed to understand the first story.

Teller-initiated stories contrast with recipient-initiated stories. In the murder interrogation, the police officer has a preference for recipient-initiated or invited stories because they have more control over the production and relevance of particulars. One of these particulars, mentioned above, is the satisfaction of legal requirements. Further, the invitation of stories, the pre-allocation of turns and elicitation of information within the murder interrogation, is relevant to the research interview.

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[13] I use the expression 'rather than' to highlight that Sacks' example *actually happened*. For programmatic remarks on recorded data, see Sacks (1984).

[14] Furthermore, at the same time, implicitly furnishing support for Watson's arguments on the unwarranted bifurcation of sequential and categorial analysis; and in particular, his rejection of the view that Sacks abandoned his concerns with categorial analysis in favour of sequential analysis (Watson, 1994a, p. 181-182; 1994b, p. 151).

[15] Note that the 'MacRobert steps' example is an invented sequence of talk.

[16] At this point, consider again the (omitted) story-telling, between blocs 10-11, from the interview with the Police Chief. The 'analytic mentality' (Schenkein, 1978b) of ethnomethodological programmes is such that the content of the story itself is not relevant, at least as the ultimate point of reference; it is indifferent towards specific stories and specific accounts.

In the murder interrogation, the police officer invites the suspect to commence a storytelling (Watson, 1990, p. 292):

```
[Watson]
28  Officer:    al::right (.) were: investigating the
                death (.) of a
29              gir::l (.7) at two o one Patterson
30  Strawson:   two ten:
31              (1.2)
32  Officer:    two ten (.2) Patterson: (.7) whoose body
                waz foun::d:
33              (1.0) dissem:bered: (.2) in the: tub at:
                that address.
34              (.6)
35  Officer:    er: will you tell me? (.6) in your own
                words: (.2)
36              what you know:: about this homicide.
37              (.9)
38  Strawson:   duyou want me to star:t from the
                beginning?
39              (.7)
40  Officer:    yers would you please?
41              (1.2)
42  Strawson:   I dropped off my girl:friend, (1.0) an:d:
                (1.2)
43              [continues with story]
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The invitation sequence has the following structure: the police officer P invites the suspect S to tell the story, then S accepts the invitation. S could accept or decline the invitation (again, see the Miranda-Escobeda rules). Invited stories have a variant structure to volunteered stories: if the invitation to tell a story is accepted, the storyteller must provide the recipient with the information the recipient requests. If certain details are requested in the invitation, and if the invitation is accepted, the storyteller must provide those details.

In interviews, there is a 'pre-allocation' of turns, and of rights and responsibilities, and this pre-allocation is manifested in question/answer sequences. That is, the 'turn-taking mechanism' departs from the 'simplest systematics' model of ordinary conversation outlined by Sacks *et al.* (1978). Parties to talk determine the order of speakers themselves, via the orientation to speakers' turns and the next transition relevance place. These procedural rules apropos allocation provide for, e.g. current speaker selects next speaker, or next-speaker self-selects. However, there is a variation on this local orientation to turn allocation in research interviews; both the interviewer and interviewee orientate to an allocation of turns which is 'pre-given'. Turns in interviews are thus 'pre-allocated'. The interviewer asks questions which the interviewee answers, and the interviewer can request further information on any answer given by the interviewee. The sociological interview requires that the turn-taking system be suspended by common agreement so the interviewee can (potentially, at least) take a long bloc at talk without major interruption.

The pre-allocation of turns in the murder interrogation, wherein the 'police officer' asks questions and the 'suspect' provides answers to questions, has a resemblance with the sociological interview. The pre-allocation of turns in the sociological interview, wherein the 'sociologist' asks the questions and the 'lay person' gives the answers, establishes the overlap between turn-taking and membership categorisation analysis. Interviews demonstrate 'an orientation to the distribution of identities amongst co-participants to whom activities or turns can consequently be "tied"' (Watson, 1979, p. 11). Thus we can also see how the membership categories in both pre-allocation systems are 'duplicatively organised': where there is an interviewer there is an interviewee (respectively, police officer and suspect, sociologist and lay person).

Conclusion

In this paper I have brought together such resources from linguistic settings that bear upon the analysis of sociological interviews. Stories, like interviews, are collaboratively, interactionally produced: either the teller requests the 'conversational floor' in order to produce an uninterrupted bloc of talk ('volunteered' stories), or is invited to do so ('invited' stories). In each case, the recipient of the story agrees to give the 'conversational floor' to the teller in order that the story can be produced.

The analysis of interviews as linguistic settings accounts for both the interviewer and interviewee, in that the interview is a collaborative accomplishment of their practical methods of sense-assembly. Interviews are collaborative, linguistic activities; as Watson (1998b, p. 8) says, an interview is 'a conjoint production'. The presentation of derivations from interviews, i.e. data obtained from interview-type procedures, do not reflect this collaborative, linguistic work which is constitutive of the interview.

The thematic organisation of data obtained *via* interviewing practices encourages a level of methodological irony not sanctioned by individual interviews, nor by individual member's responses. The thematic organisation of interview products constitutes an 'instructed reading'; as Lee (1984) refers to newspaper headlines, thematisation 'can provide instructions as to how to read' the interview-products so thematised. The work of writing-up data derived from interview-type procedures constitutes methods by which sociologists 'decontextualise and recontextualise the 'data' from the interview-specific, collaborative practices through which those data were produced' (Watson, 1998b, p. 3).

The work of identifying themes is an analyst's work, and the thematic organisation suggested by the analyst is an (ironic) imposition upon the data. The thematisation of data is a feature of an approach to interviews as transparent conduits or 'windows on the world' (Watson, 1998b) through which phenomena can be

discerned independently of the interview. That is, talk which is ostensibly 'of' a phenomenon instead of linguistic activity, occasioned for the practical purposes of an interview. As Watson states,

> we must speak [of phenomena] not only as embedded in this linguistic transaction called 'an interview', but '[phenomena] *for* the interview', [phenomena] as local, <u>in situ</u> productions embedded in the local practices of the interview – practices such as sequencing and categorisation (Watson 1998b, p. 7-8; emphasis supplied, brackets added).

This paper does not regard the interviews conducted as part of a project *re* the Manchester city-centre bombing to be interviews 'on' the bomb. To use 'the Manchester bombing' as an ostensive definition of these conversations glosses the nature of these conversations as series of accounts and assemblages of linguistic activities produced by the interviewer and interviewees. This single case, and the corpus of interviews in its entirety, shows that interviews are 'about more' than the bomb.

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Appendix: Transcript Symbols

[	indicates the onset of overlap during a speaker's turn
( )	word inaudible/unavailable for transcription
(word)	probable hearing of word, but not unequivocal
<u>Word</u>	emphasis; utterance is appreciably louder than surrounding talk
°(word)°	utterance within degree signs is appreciably quieter than surrounding talk
(( ))	transcriber's comment
::	sound stretch
:	vertical colons between line numbers indicate deleted turns
:	
(1.0)	time of approximately 1 second silence
(.)	untimed 'micropause' (less than 0.1 secs)
=	'latching', indicating follow-on without break in talk
➜	arrow highlights turn in sequence