What I will be talking about involves not very complicated things but a consideration of very, very simple things. Now I will begin by giving you some background which will let you understand something about the name of what we do: sequential analysis of conversation. Here is the way that orientation is motivated.

We are in the first instance interested in the social organisation of interaction and, insofar as we are talking about natural interaction, sequences are the most natural sorts of objects to be studying. One form of co-ordination between speakers in talk in natural interaction is that, on the whole, one party talks at a time. So, if you are going to be studying the co-ordination of people who are speaking in natural interaction, you’re going to be studying sequences of talkers. Now, we can use ‘sequence’ in a fairly specific way, differentiating serial organisation, or serial occurrence, from the sequential, and being interested primarily in the sequential. ‘Sequential’ means roughly that the parts which are occurring one after the other, or are in some before and after relationship, have some organisation as between them.

Now, how precise and what shape that organisation is, is an open question. But there is every reason to believe, assuming even a total naivete about human social behaviour, that there will be lots of well-organised sequences in it. The social interaction of the other social species is highly ritualised, ‘ritualised’ not meaning particularly religious or pro forma, but
sequentially organised in terms of more or less fixed parts, done by various of the participants in some relatively fixed orders. Now they can vary, obviously, in the extent to which there are alternatives at any given position, and they can vary in all sorts of other ways as well. But it is not an amazing thing to suppose that if you go to sit down to look at single interactions between humans involving talk, then you are going to come up with lots of sequences which will permit you to get some initial ordering of what’s happening in them, and perhaps as well of how those sequences are put together.

Now, of course, we are not all that naive, and any member of any culture knows about whole bunches of those sequences with regard to the organisation of conversation. Conversations often, overwhelmingly, begin with greeting exchanges, and those, for two parties, are little two-unit things. They can be expanded in various ways, but they can be done basically in two-unit sequences — an exchange of ‘hellos’, for example; an initial ‘hello’ occasions another ‘hello’ in the next turn right then and there, and they are done differently in various ways, that is to say, firsts and seconds can be discriminated. And after ‘hellos’ go other things. In our system of conversation ‘how are you’s’, for example, are a typical sort of thing, and they go in pairs themselves: there is a ‘how are you?’ and then an answer to it, and then an exchanged ‘how are you?’ So you can do lots of things like that and see that there is a variety of obvious orders, in sequential terms, to the organisation of conversation.

Now those sorts of facts motivate an effort to see whether there is not some more or less basic abstract sequence type in terms of which a variety of the orderings that a lot of sequences have can be captured. You could then have very general rules for a type of sequence which will catch a great many of the orderings for a whole variety of particular sequences. Any look at conversation, it seems to me anyway, would suggest that there is an obvious candidate for such a basic type of sequence. The kinds of materials it orders, it orders very simply, insofar as we are dealing with its most general features, and when you have those features you get a tremendous amount of conversation put into a very simple set of rules. The basic sequence is a two-unit sequence; the two turns in which the parts of the sequence occur are placed adjacent to each other; and for all of them you can discriminate what we will call ‘first pair parts’ from what we will call ‘second pair parts’, so that the parts are relatively ordered (see Schegloff & Sacks, 1973 for a fuller description of ‘adjacency pairs’). And a further feature obtains between first and second pair parts, which is that they are ‘type-connected’, by which I mean only something as weak as this (though it is enough for a great many things): if a party does, for example, a first pair part of some type, such as greeting,
question, offer, request, compliment, complaint, things like that, then the party who is going to do a second pair part to that first pair part picks it from the sorts of alternatives that fit the type. Then for greetings this involves greetings; for questions, various sorts of answers; for offers, acceptances and rejections; for announcements, congratulations and condolences; and so on. Now, of course, for any given first pair part, there may be a bunch more second pair parts that can be introduced; but it is enough to say that for most of the adjacency pair types, there are alternatives in the second pair part slot. For some, you pretty much have to do a given thing, but for most of them there are alternatives. That is to say, having been given an offer, you can do either an acceptance or a rejection, and both of them are 'legal'. Some other things are also legal, but we are not worrying about that right now.

So you have a thing like this: you have a turn and in it a first pair part, and a next turn and in it a second pair part, and furthermore, you have that the second pair part is type-related to the first pair part. Now that then captures methodic relationships between an enormous amount of stuff, and stuff that has a fantastic provenance in conversation, in the sense that it organises much of the tremendous potential business that goes on in conversation, etc., and there are all sorts of places in which it interestingly figures.

While we, of course, spend a lot of time working on particular pair types, such as the organisation of compliments and responses to them (see Pomerantz, 1978), the organisation of offers and what can be done in response to offers, and the like, we also are looking out for other similar, general simplicities. I am going to be talking about two such simplicities today.

Again, the initial things I am proposing are totally observable; you only have to look at any conversational materials you choose to see that they are so. Nothing, then, is being claimed about 'Wow, that's a fantastically neat thing to have seen.' But one commonly tends to avoid making 'obvious' observations because it is not obvious what thereafter is to be done with them. But omnipresence and ready observability need not imply banality, and, therefore, silence. Nor should they only set off a search for exceptions or variation. Rather, we need to see that with some such mundane recurrences we are picking up things which are so overwhelmingly true that if we are to understand that sector of the world, they are something we will have to come to terms with. And, as it happens, they are a tremendous resource.

So now, if we look at a particular sequence type, say question/answer sequences that broadly can get 'yes' or 'no' answers, then there are two obvious points at which we might make improvements at this general level.
One of them concerns that we have left it totally open as to whether there are rules for selections between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers. Another thing that we left totally open is where in their respective turns the question goes and the answer goes; we just have them in adjacent turns. According to what we have said so far, they could go anywhere in the turn — at the beginning, the middle, the end, nowhere in particular. The intention is to see if we cannot put in a gross orderliness in the first place on both these sorts of variables (that is, the choice between response types, and placement in the turn). That might permit us to focus on things that do not fit that orderliness, but will lead maybe to something very striking right off; and we do have something very striking right off.

The blandest look would say that if you examine only answer turns, then ‘yes’s’ are a lot more frequent than ‘no’s’ are. Any next look at that in its sequences would then give us a candidate ‘preference’ with regard to selection, which would run something like this: if a question is built in such a way as to exhibit a preference as between ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or ‘yes–’ or ‘no–’ like responses, then the answerers will tend to pick that choice, or a choice of that sort will be preferred by answerers, or should be preferred by answerers. Now that sort of fact holds for both ‘yes–’ and ‘no–’ preferred answers, as can be seen in the following materials. 

(1) A: And it– apparently left her quite permanently damaged (I suppose).
B: Apparently. Uh he is still hopeful.

So here is the preference for a ‘yes-like’ response in number (1), (‘I suppose’), and the answer designed by reference to that preference — ‘agreeing’ with the preference, as we will put it (‘apparently’). In number (2) we find a ‘negative’ version:

(2) A: Well is this really whatchu wanted?
B: Uh . . . not originally? No. But it’s uh . . . promotion? en it’s very interesting, I’ve been doing this onna part time basis fer a number of years.

You know perfectly well that zillions of things work that way — a next turn (e.g. answer) is in ‘agreement’ with the ‘preference’ of the prior (e.g. question). What we wanted then to do, was to see if we could investigate what might be a general principle — a ‘preference for agreement’, perhaps.

Note as well, that questions can be parts of turns with other things in them, as can answers. Then, note that the initial answer in number (1) above — ‘apparently’ — goes right at the beginning of its turn. In general, it is the case that when a question occurs in a turn that includes other things, or when
an answer does, then the question goes at the end of its turn, and the answer at the beginning of its turn. Now that juxtaposition or 'contiguity' of question and answer across successive turns takes collaboration too, as does producing an answer that 'agrees' with its question. That is to say, it takes independent activity of a questioner (to put the question at the end) and an answerer (to put the answer at the beginning) to get a contiguity of question and answer across their respective turns, as it takes separate activity for a questioner to design the question in such a way as to exhibit a preference for some answer, and an answerer to pick in accord with that preference. That is the sense in which this stuff is about co-ordination.

Now, initially we do not have much of an idea about why these two sorts of things should be so. That is, why there should be a strong preference for contiguity between question and answer, and for agreement between question and answer. But those are the two general principles that we are going to be working with. Their consequence is that, if correct, they will give us additional features of the general sequence type that we are studying (in addition to the previously mentioned two turns, adjacently placed, with first pair parts and second pair parts, and pair types connecting them), in such a way that we will have both (a) where in the turns that compose that sequence the question and the answer respectively go, and (b) some weighting of one type of answer over the other. We will have these features without knowing who the parties are, what the topic is, where the sequence had occurred, etc. That is to say, we would not need to know anything else about the sequence to know these features. And if you think about or watch conversation, then these observations seem rather true; true enough to merit further investigation of whether these are really built-in preferences, that is, built into the system. So let us start to do that part of it.

First thing that we noted, and I am going to introduce this and not do very much with it for a while, is that there is an apparent interaction between the preference for contiguity and the preference for agreement, such that, if an agreeing answer occurs, it pretty damn well occurs contiguously, whereas if a disagreeing answer occurs, it may well be pushed rather deep in to the turn that it occupies. Consider, for instance, number (3), in which 'A' wants 'B' to 'come down early':

(3) A: Yuh comin down early?
B: Well, I got a lot of things to do before gettin cleared up tomorrow. I don’t know. I w– probably won’t be too early.

Now you can see that this response is not only formed up so that the disagreement is made as weak as possible, but it is held off for a great part of the turn.
THE PREFERENCES FOR AGREEMENT AND CONTIGUITY

This is one sort of illustration, then, of the interaction between agreement and contiguity, and disagreement and noncontiguity. It is important because one of the things we were originally proposing was that answers go contiguously to questions. Plainly, there are lots and lots of answers that do not go contiguously to questions; and if we have an internal way to explain some of them, such as disagreement, then it is not just that those cases are 'part of the flux', but that the system provides for them also, on partially independent bases.

Now one of the consequences of having these things being 'pushed around' inside their turns is that you are led to look at the serial organisation of the components of turns, and then a variety of things pop out about answer turns. For example, insofar as disagreements are pushed into the back, then there is a variety of things that go in front of them, that then can get treated as 'going in front of disagreements', and that may have an import in signalling the future forthcomingness of a disagreement. Components like 'well' and/or 'I don't know', for instance, as the beginning of an answer turn, characteristically precede something less than an agreement.

In looking at the contiguity phenomena with regard to instances that do not have it (or that do not initially appear to have it), I am employing a strategy that we use a lot, and which therefore deserves a bit of description. The strategy is this: if we can isolate, among the exceptions, some classes — that does not mean some individual instances, but some classes of instances (they have to have class-like characteristics) — which turn out to be themselves oriented to the preference we are studying, then we figure it (the preference) has a sort of second order validity. That is to say, it not only works in a gross number of cases, which fit directly, but even when it does not work, you can see it working.

We do not, then, bother about getting all the exceptions; we look for classes of them that seem to operate in accordance with our principle; then, although there are certainly other factors operating, the principle is shown to be operating as well.

Having considered answer turns in which there is an answer with something else before it, we can also look at places in which there is a question at the beginning of a turn and something else after it. Now a class of such apparent exceptions to the earlier proposed positioning of questions at the ends of their turns can be isolated, which bears interestingly on the contiguity issue. That class involves turns that have two questions in them, a first and a second. Here is a really characteristic instance:

(4) A: Well that's good uh how is yer arthritis. Yuh still taking shots?
B: Yeah. Well it's, it's awright I mean it's uh, it hurts once 'n a while but it's okay.

Now what you see here is that there is a first question and second question, and then there are two answers. Note that the first answer is an answer to the second question, and the second answer is the answer to the first question. Now it is a rather general rule that where two questions are produced, and you are going to have two answers, then the order of the answers is the reverse of the order of the questions. Notice that this preserves contiguity as much as possible; the only way to get contiguity at all, once two questions are in the one turn, is by having the answer to the second question go first. So there is one sort of thing that is not so much a problem as 'well, that's sorta nice.'

Let us take another sort of thing where what you have is an answer placed late in its turn, with something before it.

(5) A: Is it near Edinburgh?
B: Edinburgh? It's not too far.

'It's not too far' is the answer; before that, something else. But note that the 'something else' is a question, a question that is a partial repeat of the question that was asked in the first place. The formal character of this description indicates that this is a class of exceptions to the 'answer first in its turn' observation. Furthermore, although you don't have question-answer contiguity across turns, you do have it within the answer turn itself. Now, that sort of thing turns out also to operate in the multiple questions cases. There, having a question with something else after it can be seen as a class of exceptions once it is noted that, characteristically, the second question in such a series will commonly be a candidate answer to the first; so that you again have a sort of contiguity within that turn, as in the first turn in number (6):

(6) A: That where you live? Florida?
B: That's where I was born.

So, in those instances in which we don't have an obvious contiguity across turns by virtue of the 'mispositioning' of question or answer (and in some of those in which we do), we can see that in some of them aspects of that contiguity are preserved within single turns (or within single turns as well). So, that is one sort of way we go about establishing the second order operation of the preference we are looking at.

Here is another orderliness derivative from the relative positioning of answers and questions in their turns (on which contiguity depends). Examine number (7):
(7) A: Didja get that from last week's group?
   B: Yeah. Didn't you?
   A: Yeh.

We have here a very common sort of occurrence; in 'B's' turn, there is first an answer, and then a question. I want you to notice the kind of thing that gives us a handle on, and what it begins to show us can do with sequences. We have two two-turn objects, and we are getting a way of binding together three turns, or seeing how three turns are built bound together. That is to say, the answer in B is, of course, locking on to the question in A1, and the question in B is providing for a locking to the answer in A2. Now that sort of locking is fairly strong in a further way. Having provided for answers to go at the beginning of turns, and questions, to go at the end of turns, we have of course the possibility of them going in the same turns, and in that order, answer + question, which is the way they tend to go. But in the 'answer + question' turn type, there appears to be a constraint on the kind of question that can go there, to be a question that is 'on topic' with the answer that it follows. This answer, of course, is, in turn, on topic with the question that it follows, which then makes what further follows also connected — not just in terms of these unit-by-unit sequence connectors but within some single bit of [topical — Ed.] business.

However, there is a type of flexibility which can be introduced between answer and question which allows other kinds of relationship than 'single topic'-ness, while holding the turns locked together by reference to the adjacency pair rules. Thus, even if you have connectors backward between each turn-part and its predecessor, you can get the possibility that the answer that follows the turn will not be topically related to the answer that started the turn. Consider the following:

(8) B: Nno? [Why wh ]what's a mattuh with y−yih sound HA:PPy,] hh
   A: (No)  Nothing

Now if you just have 'no, why?' then you are back to 'why did you ask the question?' Insofar as you could build a next question after 'why', that connects to 'why', like 'Why, what's the matter?' then you are moving in such a way as to begin to get the possibility of a 'step-wise topic shift.' That is to say, what you can begin to build in is the way in which topics can move within turns, so that we can catch what we naturally know, which is that topics do not change just at the boundaries of turns, and, of course, that speakers can orient to producing changes within turns which are then intrinsically smooth changes, and those can occur within such sorts of things as have answers at their boundaries.
Let me now turn back to agreement and begin to look at some of the ways in which agreement might be a formal preference within adjacency pairs. Now you can see, if you look at number (6) again, and numbers (9), (10), (11), and (12) below, that they are shaped with an orientation to their agreement; any of them could obviously have been formulated as a disagreement, or have had the facts reported in such a way as to give a disagreeing answer.

(6) **A:** That where you live? Florida?
   **B:** That's where I was born.

Thus, in response to 'That where you live? Florida?', 'B' obviously does not live in Florida; he lives in California. He could say, 'no'. He does not. He finds a way of providing an 'agreeing' response. This is one way in which an orientation to agreement might be said to operate to shape an answer in partial independence of what the facts are.

Now there is both ample scope for such an orientation, and a real constraint on it. Even if agreement is something formal, something formal that is supposed to be exhibited as early as possible in a turn, and that operates to shape an answerer's behaviour, we must also note that 'it's a real world out there'; there is going to have to be room for disagreement to be done — somehow registered. That is to say, the original phenomena cannot be wiped out of the world by a conversational preference, though the talk about them can be shaped and perhaps otherwise affected by it. So one outcome of the shaping of responses in favour of agreement is that there will be a position in which to put in elements that could otherwise appear as disagreements, which can, then, be cast in the agreement mode as being modifications or exceptions. For instance, numbers (9) and (10).

(9) **A:** So is this permanent?
    **B:** Yuh it's 'permanent'; permanent until I get moved again.

(10) **A:** How about friends. Have you friends?
    **B:** I have friends. So called friends. I had friends. Let me put it that way.

Now that having been proposed, again a very simple thing obtains, which is that if you have an answer which accords with the preference by an initial agreement, then you have an initial agreement and modifications or exceptions go after that, as they do in numbers (9) and (10). Now the fact that there is a place for modifications and exceptions has lots and lots of consequences. But you have no idea what will take exceptions; that is to say, the character or strength of the initial agreement does not 'predict' whether or not it will carry exceptions at its tail. For example:
(11) A: 'N they haven't heard a word huh?
B: Not a word, uh–uh. Not– Not a word. Not at all.
Except – Neville's mother got a call. . .

(12) A: You are afraid of your father
B: Oh yes. Definitely. I– I am. To a certain extent.

The parties may be being a bit ironic in some of these last four instances, but note that the way in which they do an ironic bit is to produce an agreement in the first instance and then modify it away.

In this last discussion, we have been brought to notice the shapes of turns. We are developing some features of the serial organisation of answer turns involving 'yes' or agreeing answers, as we were earlier getting some features of the serial organisation of answer turns involving 'no' answers or disagreeing answers.

Let me show you one further sort of interesting aspect of the preference for agreement. If there is a preference for agreement, then you might suppose that 'or' questions would be difficult — that parties would be tempted into trying to get both parts answered 'yes'. Consider fragment number (13):

(13) A: ((clears throat)) Was yer lenience, in yer opinion, because of the fact thatchu uh thought this would be a better way of controlling? uh the mem//bers or was it because of the fact thatchu wanted them to like you.
B: Yes. Because–
B: Well, partly it was because I wanted them to like me, and they– I mean they were all my friends. Everybody in that dorm had known me//fer years. An’–

At 'controlling the members', 'B' comes in with his answer, 'yes, because–.' However, the questioner goes on 'Or was it because of the fact that you wanted them to like you?' Typical inconsistent alternatives, and, having done 'yes because' to the first, we get again, 'yes' for the second, 'well partly it was because I wanted them to like me.'

Ok, now we have so far dealt with the ways in which answerers shape their answer to be in agreement, and that might look as though what they are doing is agreeing with what the questioner happens to prefer. That just is not believable. If there is what we are talking about, namely, an abstract or formal preference for agreement, then we have to see that the questioner is designing the question not just to get a personal preference, but is designing the question with an orientation to getting agreement. That this is so can be seen by such sorts of materials as the following:
(14) A: They have a good cook there?  
((pause))  
Nothing special?  
B: No, everybody takes their turns.

(15) A: Ken you walk?  
(0.4)  
A: Ud be too hard for yuh?  
B: Oh... darling I don't know. Uh it's bleeding a little, e' jis took the bandage off yes'day...

A sort of thing you get is: the person asks the question exhibiting a preference, and there is a pause, 8 no answer, and they then revise that question to exhibit the reverse preference, and then (with no further delay) they get an answer in accord with it. Thus in number (14), 'A' first displays a preference for a 'yes'; when a silence intervenes, A shifts to a form which invites agreement with the negative. So also in number (15), the first question is built for 'walking'; the second for 'not walking'. So there is one sort of way that a questioner can be seen to be orienting to getting agreement, i.e. they try to end up with a form that can be agreed with.

Here is another sort of thing that will show us the orientation to agreement by 'first pair part' speakers.

(16) A: Uh I am surprised he didn't call you  
B: Well's alright.  
A: ((laugh)) Did he– he didn't evidently  
B: No.

(17) A: Thos're–Are those that same– No that's not the pattern I gave you  
B: No I know– I've broken from the pattern.

In number (16), 'A' first starts a question with one preference; then that is stopped, interrupted, and an answer displaying the other preference is done by the asker, and that is agreed to by the recipient. In number (17), speaker 'A' starts out apparently to say, 'thos’re [the same pattern ...];' it then gets transformed, maybe preserving the preference for a 'yes', maybe starting to modify it; finally what would have been a 'disagreeing' answer is done by this party, and that is agreed to by its recipient. This is the same as was going on in number (16). Were it not that the questioners want to get the 'right' answer, that is, that they want to get the question that can be or will be 'agreed' to, they would not have to do this job at all; they could perfectly well put out one question, and have it turn out 'yes' or 'no' as it happens.
[We noted earlier that answerers construct their turns such that 'agreeing' answers come early in their turns and are thereby contiguous with their questions, whereas 'disagreeing' answers are deferred in their turns and are not contiguous with their questions. Note now that questioners are not passive in this regard. Given evidence that a disagreement is 'in the works' for some initial version of a question, they reformulate it in the direction of possible agreement, with the consequence that a) a disagreeing response is avoided, and b) the agreement that ensues makes, with the question, a contiguous pair. So the linkage of contiguity and agreement is oriented to by both questioners and answerers, can operate to avoid a disagreement, and is an aspect of a formal and anonymous apparatus for agreement/disagreement, rather than being a matter of individual preferences.]

A next question might be: are there some sorts of formal things that operate when a disagreement does occur, such that the preference for agreement is retained across the occurrence of the disagreement, operating then to attempt to bring it to a close as fast as possible? What I want to suggest is that there is such an apparatus; again, it is not that 'people try to do it', it is that there is an apparatus that has them being able to do that.

Consider number (18), and focus on lines 11–13 to begin with:

(18)    7 A: First of all you haftuh control yerself. Know about yourself.
         8 (2.5)
         9 A: And be capable of l:living.
       10 A: Once you– are to control yer inner self
       11 A: Y'undustan what–
       12 A: Y's, y'see what I'm//talkin–
       13 B: Yeah–uh– I think I do, uh except uh . . .
       14 A: Uh– it's controver//sial (particularly–)
       15 B: I– I don't like–
       16 B: I don't like the idea of controlling yerself–
       17 B: I don't think you mean– by the way–
       18 B: Yer using the word cn//trol
       19 A: No. I don't mean–
       20 B: –yerself but I don't think//you–
       21 A: No.
       22 B: –really mean//that
       23 A: I don't mean control yerself. A:ble to adapt.
       24 A: Uh–uh: more flexible person. Uh–uh:–
       25 A: What is it– discipline, adjust– discipline may be a better
       26 word. I don't know.
       27 B: Uh– Uh well, I– I like to use the word tuned in. Someone
wh's tuned in t' the conditions a:nd uh who's responsive uh::: who know what's happening and knows what-- what-- what has t' be done.

At line 13, an initial answer turn by 'B' is formed in a typical way for an answer turn in which there is going to be a disagreement. There is a progression in which there is the 'Yeah', a typical agreeing object; then the beginning of a doubt being expressed — 'Yeh' plus 'I think I do'; and then an 'except', that being the position from which disagreement may be launched. B is going to disagree, 'A' sees that he is going to disagree, and announces that 'it's controversial'. At lines 15–16, B begins to turn it into, he doesn't 'like the idea of controlling' himself; 'I don't think you mean, by the way--yer using the word control'. At that point (lines 19–20) A now comes to the start of a compromise, that is to say, the beginning of a backdown, 'No, I don't mean', and B in turn resumes the, 'I don't think you really mean that'. A then goes through a series of alternatives — 'able to adapt', 'a more flexible person', 'what is it-- discipline, adjust, discipline may be a better word, I don't know' — a list of candidates, you pick one. There is, then, a move to compromise by A. B offers a candidate of his own, 'Uh, uh well, I-- I like to use the word tuned in'. So now they have understood each other.

Note that the 'compromise' is achieved over a series of turns ostensibly addressed to 'better understanding'. There is a separate machinery designed for dealing with misunderstandings, and it draws attention to things that are not otherwise much focussed on in conversation, apparently secondary bits of talk trying to 'get things right'. Now we know that the 'misunderstanding machinery' is itself 'formal', in the sense that it operates without regard to disagreements; it operates in lots of places where there is one or another sort of local failure of understanding. However, it occurs a great deal around disagreements without regard to what the sources of disagreement might be. The 'persistence' of the preference for agreement can be seen in part by the use of the 'misunderstanding machinery' to try to resolve disagreements when they occur. In looking at number (19), I would like you to be able to see that the same mechanism is working here, and does not have to do with particularly knowing this guy or that:

(19) A: But I have a question on procedure now. You have your own team— your own group. Are you going to be working on curriculum with your group aside from what the total group does here? And isn't this going to be somewhat confusing ah to try to pull together for the total group here— do they fit in or is it going to mean that you are going to be way out in left field
and then you are going to have to come back for the total group?

B: I don’t think that it means that I’m going to be way out in left field ((laughter)) I hope I’m not that far apart from you.

A: Well no– I don’t mean that far apart but I mean if you’re working another day of the week on the same kind of thing but with a different group of people ah or looking at it–

B: ((interrupting)) We work with the same group of people really.

A: But not all of the same group.

B: But not call the same– uh huh ((while B speaking))

Again a disagreement is handled by ‘coming to an understanding’. Now if ‘understanding’ is that sort of object, then people who are in search of understanding may be in for a bit of a surprise, in that it might not have to do with the sorts of things that we have so far supposed.

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Question: Why do you focus on the apparatus rather than what the people are trying to do in a conversation?

Answer: Well, you cannot find what they’re trying to do until you find the kinds of things they work with. If the system had a built-in bias for agreement, and you did not know about it, then you’d be counting a whole bunch of things as agreements that might well be accounted for in other ways. Now I do not know how many such things would turn out to be involved, but what I want to do is establish that maybe it is involved in some (many?) of them. Then the question is: it is not obvious that, in some given instance, the person ‘agreed’ and, therefore, they should be said to have agreed in some way in which you would say, ‘they wanted to agree’. Now what they wanted to do is another question, and it is only, I think when we begin to have some considerable idea about the sorts of things they are operating with (like a preference for agreement), and the sorts of ways they operate with those things, that we have much of an idea about such matters as ‘what they’re trying to do’.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. A public lecture at the 1973 Linguistic Institute, held at the University of Michigan. Edited by Emanuel A. Schegloff with the assistance of Jennifer Mandelbaum, from a tape recording made at the time.
2. The ‘of course’s’ are done with a mild intention of ‘we should be able to see that, once we know it’s so’; not that we could have figured it out, or we did figure it out, and then found that it was so.

3. For example, some of the alternatives to ‘answers’ as nexts to questions look like they are not very general, and others do. One quite general type of alternative is ‘counters’. Counter-questions seem to be general to a whole bunch of sorts of things, and we ought to notice what technically interesting objects they are. Note especially that they transpose the question and answer positions; so that, if somebody is given a very hard question, and they can do a counter, and it might be hard for the questioner too, then there is a way in which some of the things that questioners might otherwise try to do to answerers can be affected by the potential things that answerers can do back to them. This is a fully formal and methodic potential—what we can call an ‘apparatus’ (cf. pp. 65 to the end below). So somebody might want to ‘put the screws’ to somebody very powerfully, but there is an apparatus that tends to give answerers the potential of using whatever it is that the questioner has done to them to do that to the questioner. My favourite instances have to do with a class of insults that we talk about as ‘genetic insults’. One famous classical instance involves a village scene, a boy standing by the side of the road, and an old lady coming along with a bunch of donkeys, and he says, ‘Good morning, mother of asses’, and she says, ‘Good morning my son’. Now what that says is that a whole class of insults that you might address to people provide them with the very materials with which to return the insult. Now there are lots of counter-structures like that, and they are very, very neat things.

4. In putting some of these things on the board, I am not intending to prove something to you by an instance, except in certain ways. You should try to see the way in which those instances evidence participants’ use of rather general ‘procedures’ which you could reconstruct pretty much out of a single instance; the procedure can then produce a whole bunch of other instances.

5. [Harvey Sacks was using a pointer; the editor has made an informed guess about the target of the pointer.]

6. You can, of course, have a sequence in which you have just a single question in the first turn, and just a single answer in the second. In such cases as well, the construction of an answer may exploit its contiguity to a question. Such answers can be built, and very commonly are built, in such a way as to be parasitic on the syntax of the question they answer, indeed to be built within the same sentence.

   a) A: Were you eating?
      B: Some grapes

   b) A: Are you fed up?
      B: To the neck.

Now I want you to notice that this a type of sequence that has very sentence-like properties. And insofar as the initial reason that linguists are not interested in sequences is that they are interested in sentences, then note that there is a variety of classes of natural sequences which do have sentences as, operating across, the whole sequence; that is to say, it is not bizarre that answers have this phrasal character very, very commonly.

7. Now let me just mention for those who might be interested in it, the preference for agreement, translated into a dispreference for disagreement, seems not only to involve this sort of interaction in which the disagreements are pushed into the end of the answer turn; but the ‘no’s’ seem often to have the character that you
people [i.e. linguists. — Ed.] talk about as being 'deleted'. That is to say, 'yes's' occur if it is an agreeing answer; they say 'yes' and they may say more things. If it is a disagreeing answer, they will characteristically do something like, 'Well, I don't know', and they may find a way to do it which does not involve them in actually saying 'no'. We are not talking about Harry or Joe or some particular sorts of people; we are looking at possible system properties. It is not that somebody or everybody psychologically does not like to disagree, but they may not like to disagree because they are supposed to not like to disagree; they are supposed to try to agree perhaps. Cf. the answer to the audience question at the end of the text.

8. [Note that the pause involves a form of non-contiguity — Ed.]

9. This paragraph has been interpolated by the editor for clarity.

10. Now here is another procedure useable by first pair part speakers when disagreement has occured that also has a tremendous generality to its use [illustrated here by a non-question/answer sequence type — Ed.]:

c) A: You got an answer for everything so shuddup.
   B: I don't want to
   A: I didn't ask you to, I was just kidding.
   B: Oh, OK

'You got an answer for everything, so shuddup'. Return to that: 'I don't want to'. Return to that: 'I didn't ask you to. I was just kidding.' Now the 'I was just kidding' seems to be a form with which, given a disagreeing response, one can withdraw the question, so as to thereby remove the disagreement; and plainly, that can serve as a 'post operator' for bunches of places in which such disagreements have already been made manifest, involving then that questioners have a position in which, after the sequence has been run, they can do such a modification.